JULY 1st ISSUE, 1929
VOL. LXXI No. 2

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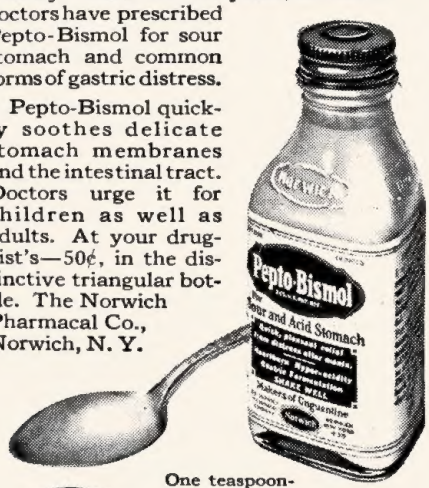

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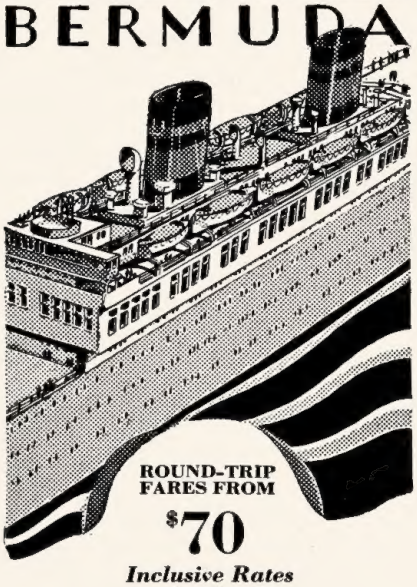

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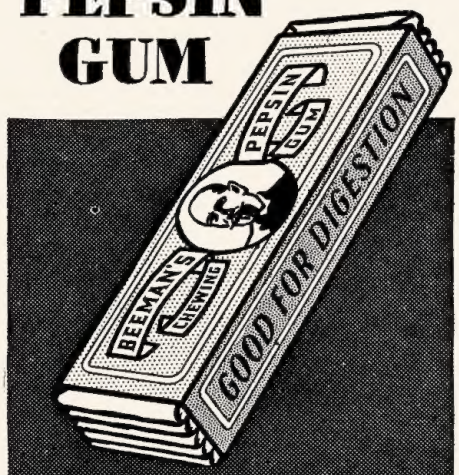

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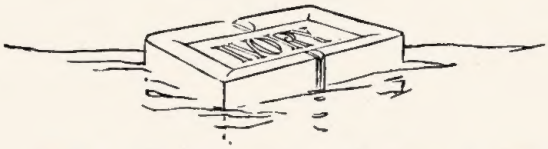

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A Thrilling Search for a Lost Aviator in the Heart of the Venezuelan Jungle

CHAPTER I

MEN MEET

TWO MEN sat at a desk in the spacious office of General Perez, governor of the Venezuelan state of Bolívar, past which flows the untamed River Orinoco.

The general—stocky, soldierly, square jawed—gazed at a long, half opened window. Outside, a train of burros laden with country produce plodded sedately past, their little hoofs beating hollow tattoo on the cobbles. His thoughts, however, were far from such prosaic scenes.

"I know, of course, Mr. Hammond, of the disappearance of that North American aviator last year," he said. "After crossing the Caribbean Sea he was seen over our Rio Orinoco, about a hundred miles above here, flying high and straight toward Brazil, his destination. When it became known that he had failed to reach the Amazon I started immediate inquiry to learn whether he had fallen in our back country. But no news of him has ever come out. So I assumed—and still believe—that he fell somewhere in Brazil."

The tall American across the desk nodded understanding.

"That's perfectly natural," he replied. "But southern Venezuela is rather wild, I'm told, and there are plenty of desolate places where a flyer could crash and never be heard from."

MOUNTAIN

"True," admitted the governor. "The mountainous land south of here is a wilderness, imperfectly known—and, in some parts, unknown. Excepting a few traders and rubber gatherers on the upper Orinoco, nobody but Indians lives there. But the rubber dealers use Indians as laborers, and get news from them. And the fall of an airplane would be such an extraordinary event that the story would

A Thrilling Search for a Lost Aviator in the Heart of the Venezuelan Jungle

MOUNTAIN *of the* GODS

A NOVELETTE OF THE UPPER ORINOCO

by

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

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The calm gray eyes of the Northerner smiled slightly.

"Yes," he laconically answered. "It has."

"Eh?" The governor stared. "You mean to say that you have definite information—?"

"No, not definite. Very indefinite. But still, it came from a white man and seemed worth investigating."

The ruler of Bolivar frowned a little.

"I do not quite understand," he countered, with a touch of stiffness, "how such news could reach North America without first coming to me."

"It came from a Doctor Thorpe, an explorer, who recently died at the island of Trinidad."

"Oh!" Swift recognition lighted the other's face. "Doctor Thorpe! Yes, yes. He had been studying the upriver country for two years when he grew ill and had to go out for medical treatment and change of air. But he waited too long before starting. I saw him here before he took the Trinidad steamer. He looked badly and talked little. Still, it would seem that he would have told me of an airplane crash if he had known of one."

"He didn't know it. He knew only of a queer tale that came to him from some Indians, and in the last letter he wrote home he happened to mention it in a joking way. But, as it tallied with the facts and probabilities of Greenleaf's flight, we guessed at the rest.

"You see, both Doctor Thorpe and Doctor Thomas, who came to Venezuela with him, were sent down here by a geographical society with which I have recently been in communication. Each worked alone, Thorpe in the Ventuari region at the east, Thomas in the Guaviare district at the west. Eventually both

A NOVELETTE OF

THE UPPER ORINOCO

by

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

of the GODS

go throughout the Indian country and finally reach some white man."

The calm gray eyes of the Northerner smiled slightly.

"Yes," he laconically answered. "It has."

"Eh?" The governor stared. "You mean to say that you have definite information—?"

"No, not definite. Very indefinite. But still, it came from a white man and seemed worth investigating."

The ruler of Bolivar frowned a little.

"I do not quite understand," he countered, with a touch of stiffness, "how such news could reach North America without first coming to me."

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"Oh!" Swift recognition lighted the other's face. "Doctor Thorpe! Yes, yes. He had been studying the upriver country for two years when he grew ill and had to go out for medical treatment and change of air. But he waited too long before starting. I saw him here before he took the Trinidad steamer. He looked badly and talked little. Still, it would seem that he would have told me of an airplane crash if he had known of one."

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"You see, both Doctor Thorpe and Doctor Thomas, who came to Venezuela with him, were sent down here by a geographical society with which I have recently been in communication. Each worked alone, Thorpe in the Ventuari region at the east, Thomas in the Guaviare district at the west. Eventually both

grew sick and went to Trinidad—but not together. Thorpe came out first. He died before Thomas reached Trinidad in his turn. And, by the way, Thorpe died from sudden heart failure, not from disease.

"Before that unexpected attack finished him he mailed home a long typewritten report of his discoveries; also a letter saying that he would come back here and complete his work. That letter was cheerful, and rather humorous. It spoke particularly of the superstitious attitude of the Indian mind; the readiness of the average Indian to believe in supernatural happenings, but to disbelieve actual facts. He said he had shown the Indians postcard pictures of some of the tall buildings in New York and they declared the pictures were lies, because men could not build houses so high. And then he went on—just a minute, please; I have his exact words here."

From an inner pocket he drew a thin notebook. And from the first pages he read:

> "On the other hand, this is the sort of thing they will accept without question:
>
> "There is a high mountain called Umtucu, far up the Rio Manapiare, which I have not yet been able to reach because of constant intertribal wars. This mountain is sacred, and very tall tales are told about it, all of which the indigenes implicitly believe. The latest one to drift down from that region is that some time ago an enormous bird came flying from Umtucu, making a horrible noise. This bird burst into flame and swooped to the ground. Then the gods of this god mountain made much thunder and cast bolts of lightning in every direction. The bird, you see, was a thunder bird god who had quarreled with his fellow gods and flown away, roaring with rage, and a free-for-all fight had then developed among the others. When my perverse sense of humor made me laugh at this yarn of a celestial family row my brown boys were much offended."

The reader chuckled as he slid the memorandum back into its pocket. The governor laughed.

"Typically Indian," he declared. "Imagine that god flying off, with all his wife's relatives throwing things at him! Ha-ha-ha! But do you think the thunder bird was that flyer Greenleaf?"

"Rather," nodded Hammond. "According to the sketch maps sent to the society by Thorpe, that Rio Manapiare is directly in line with Greenleaf's last known course. Thorpe, naturally, knew nothing about Greenleaf's flight. He had no radio set; in fact, he had nothing he could possibly do without. His plan always was to work alone and travel light—"

"Which," interpolated the executive, "is the only feasible way to cover ground in that difficult region."

"Yes, no doubt. At any rate, he knew nothing about Greenleaf. Otherwise he would not have dismissed the story of the thunder bird so lightly. But we who know both sides of the tale consider it worth looking into. So I'm going to look."

"I see."

PEREZ contemplated the face across the desk, noting the steady eyes, firm nose, tenacious mouth and strong jaw; also the wide shoulders and deep chest beneath it. Abruptly he said:

"Mr. Hammond, I know you have made one trip up the Orinoco with Doctor Thomas, who, unfortunately, was killed by Indians. But are you really experienced in exploration?"

"Well, no," confessed Hammond. "I'm not a scientist, and that trip with Thomas was my first in South America. But he taught me a lot, and I think I can handle myself now. In fact, I resolved some time ago to carry on a bit with his unfinished work; that's why I wrote home to the geographical society. But now that I've learned of Greenleaf and Thorpe I think there's a bigger job waiting on the Manapiare. And that's where I'm going. The only assistance I ask is in finding a trustworthy guide."

The governor was silent, thinking. His gaze reverted to the window.

"The Manapiare," he mused aloud, "is said to be a river of death, inhabited only

by savage Indians who fight one another and hate white men. As Doctor Thorpe's letter shows, not even he was able to make friends of them. His own Indians were of another tribe. But— Ho!"

He started, eyes suddenly sharpening. Past the window was sauntering a big native, heading idly downhill toward the broad river and the anchorage of boats. In three seconds he was gone, obliterated by the thick wall. But he was not to go much farther.

The gubernatorial right hand darted under the desk, pressed a button imperiously. Somewhere sounded a dry buzz. In a wide doorway opening into a flowery patio a wiry, alert man in plain clothes appeared as by magic, right hand under his coat, eyes glued to the visitor who sat so near the ruler of the state. Then, as that ruler volleyed a dozen rapid words, he relaxed, turned, vanished.

"A man has just passed who may be useful to you," explained the general. "As I was saying—er—"

"It's rough country," Hammond picked up the thread of conversation. "Yes, I know all that. But Thorpe lived on the Manapiare, and meant to go in among those hostiles and reach Umtucu. So it's not a hopeless project; and I'll chance it—at least, far enough to learn whether the thunder bird was Greenleaf."

His calm confidence brought a faint smile to the governor's lips.

"*Bien*," he responded. "I must confess that I should like to have that river investigated, as it is almost totally unknown. Your airman is, of course, dead long since. But if you succeed in traveling that river and returning, my government will be much interested in your observations. So, although I warn you that the journey is dangerous, I shall gladly assist you. And here is the best guide I can think of. *Aquí, hombre!* Come here!"

Hammond turned his head doorward. There stood two men: one, the keen eyed man in drab clothes who had sprung forth in answer to the surreptitious signal; the other a sunbronzed giant in whites, straw sombrero in hand, mouth set, eyes vigilant.

THE BIG Venezuelan approached alone, his glance swiftly probing the faces at the desk. In his stiff muscled stride could be read a complex of apprehension, wariness and dogged courage. Evidently he did not know why he had been suddenly halted and summoned before the all-powerful governor, and suspected that some false accusation had been laid against him; but he was brave enough to confront and combat any accuser. In the general's keen eyes showed a glint of amusement. When he spoke, however, his voice was brusk.

"You are Pablo Castillo?" he demanded, as the giant stopped.

"*Sí, mi general*," sturdily acknowledged Pablo.

"You have been recently a river captain on the Alto Orinoco?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

"*Bien.* Do you know the Rio Ventuari and the Rio Manapiare?"

"Not well, sir. They are off the Orinoco. But I have been on the Ventuari, and know where the Manapiare enters it."

"Good. Here is a señor who means to go there and requires a pilot well acquainted with the Amazonas region and absolutely trustworthy. I have been told that you are both."

"*Sí.* I am," asserted the big fellow.

He now stood thoroughly at ease. His brown eyes moved to meet those of the Northerner, a slight curiosity manifest in their depths. After a few seconds of mutual inspection both men smiled in approval.

"The señor," resumed Perez, "means to take up the work of exploration in Amazonas which stopped some months ago. You will travel with him and guide him well."

The pilot's eyes narrowed slightly as he heard the military statement concerning his immediate future. It was plain that, although he knew the bidding of a

governor to be tantamount to despotic decree, he was accustomed to commanding rather than to being commanded; furthermore, he had enough rugged independence to decline the service if he disliked it. But, after another steady look into the face of the Northerner, he did not refuse. Instead, he inquired:

"Has the señor a boat? My sailing *piragua* is being repaired, and will not be ready for two weeks."

"I have a gasoline launch," answered Hammond. "It is old, but tough and fast."

"I can not drive a *lancha*, señor. I am a sailor."

"You won't have to drive it, *hombre*. I can do that myself."

The two regarded each other again; and again their eyes smiled. Hammond arose swiftly, reaching a height equal to that of the riverman.

"You're the man I want, Pablo," he decided. "How about wages?"

"Two hundred bolívares a month, señor, with food," responded the stalwart fellow.

"Fair enough. Come, let's go. *Adios*, general. I'll see you again before I start up the river. And many thanks for your aid!"

"It is a pleasure."

The governor stood. Hands gripped. The two newly met companions strode to the door. General Perez, veteran of more than one battle, and adventurer by instinct, looked smilingly after the big men swinging away side by side, hot on the trail of a dangerous quest. Then, with a sigh, he turned to a mass of official mail, rang for his secretary, and buried himself in the dry daily routine.

CHAPTER II

THE HIDDEN HOUSE

NEARLY a thousand miles from the sea, a boat crept toward a river unexplored. In it sat the two men who had met in the office of General Perez.

The boat was long, gray, blistered by torrid sun, topped by a superstructure of wire mosquito netting and faded awning; a clumsy looking craft, yet a marvel in a land accustomed only to poled *piraguas* and paddled dugouts; for she came on without polers or paddlers, driven by a hidden engine possessing the power of a hundred horses.

The men, lounging behind and beside the steering wheel, were as careless of personal appearance as of the looks of their vessel. The well tailored gray suit which Hammond had worn at Bolívar, the clean white garments of Pablo, all had disappeared. Now the outlander traveled in loose, baggy khaki and soiled tennis shoes, the native in faded blue denim and *alpargatas*—sandals. Black stubble fringed their jaws, and their wind swept hair was tangled and askew. Both slouched in the comfortable postures of seasoned cruisers, Hammond's long hands resting easily on the wheel, Pablo gazing languidly, though observantly, at the rock studded water. The pilot spoke seldom for, in the long run up the treacherous Orinoco, the Northerner had proved himself water wise.

In the long cockpit behind them were a few cans of gasoline, a small locker trunk, two duffle bags and some boxed food. In an improvised rack before them stood a couple of rifles, ready for quick seizure. Over the back of Hammond's canvas chair hung a cartridge belt, whence dangled a holstered .45 pistol. Beside Pablo's right foot lay a naked machete. With a couple of rolled hammocks and a compact camera, these impedimenta comprised the entire cargo. The heavy load of reserve fuel which, at the start, had crammed the sturdy vessel to capacity was nearly exhausted.

The Orinoco now lay far behind. Days ago the steadily swimming craft had left it to journey up a green river even more wild—the Rio Ventuari, flowing from the highlands of Guayana, wherein lived only scattered tribes of Indians and prowling beasts. In all the two hundred miles of voyaging up this new stream, only one

sign of the existence of human beings had been sighted: an old, flimsy hut on a tiny islet, which, Pablo said, had served as camp for some small party of roving Indians. Elsewhere had been seen nothing but monkeys and birds in the jungled verdure along shore and a swimming tapir or two in the water.

The river ran in long meanders, forcing the boat to travel, in turn, eastward or westward or northward while pursuing its main course into the northeast. Except for small hillocks, the shoreline remained virtually the same at all points; and long views were cut off by the dense stand of tall timber along those bank tops. Yet now and then some distant mountain became temporarily visible—dimmed by heat haze, featureless, but beckoning the newcomer ever on. At the next change of direction it would fade from sight, perhaps to arise later, perhaps not. Each view of those heights brought to the driver's eyes a quick glow. Remote, evanescent, they lured him as elusive women lure some men.

And now, at midafternoon, the vessel was approaching the Rio Manapiare, on which the late Doctor Thorpe had made his headquarters. In the bush along shore, and in the houses hundreds of miles behind, all creatures who could do so were indulging in siesta; drowsing, dozing, or deeply sleeping, until the hottest period of the day should pass. For the two voyagers, however, there was no rest; and, continually sheltered by their overhead awning, they needed none. Although the lids of both might droop from hours of eye strain, both were wide awake and watchful.

In the course of the past few days the mouths of a dozen sizable streams had been met, all looking virtually alike. At each of them Pablo had languidly shaken his head. But now, as a gigantic *ceiba* towered above the other trees off the starboard bow, he peered expectantly. And soon, as that jungle titan came abeam, a silent river suddenly opened up to port.

"The Manapiare, señor," announced the guide.

"Ah! Good!"

HAMMOND accelerated the motor a little and swung into the new waterway. After a hundred yards or so, however, he slowed and frowned around him. The house which he had expected to find at or near the mouth of the Manapiare was not there. Nor was any other sign of habitation in sight. Only the usual unkempt verdure lined the shores, so closely knit as to make it obvious that no man had lived within it.

"Keep on," counseled the river veteran. "The doctor probably lived as the Indians do—hidden away in some spot not easily found. No Indian settlement is ever made at the mouth of a river."

Slowly, almost noiselessly, the vessel crept onward. It had gone more than a mile when Pablo grunted and pointed.

At the right opened a short, but deep, indentation in the shore. Its sides were fringed by the usual jumble of palms, hardwoods, bushes and vines; but at the end was a cleared space and the beginning of a narrow path, plainly revealed by the westering sun. It was a snug little port. And it was not unused. Lying at the shore beside the path were two dugout canoes, one long, one short.

On those low, dark boats the gaze of the newcomers dwelt for several seconds, and then on the path beyond. No man was in sight. No sound came, save the sleepy squawk of a parrot roosting somewhere in the upstream bush.

The prow of the motorboat turned into the cove and slid toward the end. The driver killed the power. The vessel floated on by its own momentum.

"Indians?" quietly questioned Hammond, nodding at the canoes.

"Perhaps," softly responded Pablo. "But we had best be careful, señor. In this Territorio de Amazonas are *guapos*—desperadoes—who sometimes must hide from all other men. And if any such *hombres* are here there will be shooting."

He eyed his employer sidewise. Heretofore the señor had shown himself to be a quick and accurate shot at game; but there had been no shooting at men. On

the contrary, the Northerner had met the Orinocans with an easy goodfellowship which they had reciprocated. How he would acquit himself against malefactors was, for the moment, problematical.

The quick hardening of his face, however, foreboded forcible retaliation against any assailant. Into Pablo's experienced eyes came a glint of satisfaction. Then he again looked shoreward. Both men watched the path until the bow touched earth. There both stepped out with rifles ready. Pablo swiftly tied the mooring line around the base of a tree. Hammond started up the trail.

"Stay here," he bade.

The Venezuelan stiffened, scowled, growled refusal, and determinedly followed. After plumbing his obdurate gaze his employer smiled faintly and went on without further words.

The foot track curved a little among the trees, ascending a sharp grade to a level space clear of all verdure. Within that clearing stood a small but well built house of clay, roofed with thick thatch, facing toward the water. Its door was shut, its one front window closed against the sun. It seemed deserted. But against the wall, near the door, leaned a paddle.

The newcomers stood watching it and scrutinizing the bush surrounding the open space. No life was visible or audible. Minutes passed. Then Hammond, studying the front of the domicile more deliberately, voiced a soft sound of certainty. Above the door he had discovered, set in the gray clay, dark sticks forming two rectangular letters: D. T.

"David Thorpe," he muttered.

"*Sí*. This is his camp," concurred Pablo, *sotto voce*.

"Well, we'll take possession of it."

"Walk around it first," cautioned Pablo.

Hammond scowled impatiently and walked straight to the door. But there he paused, listening. From within came a low sound of snoring. Somebody there was indulging in the customary siesta.

Pablo eyed the leaning paddle, noting its shape and color and grain. Then he nudged his employer, turned a thumb toward the implement, and whispered—

"Brazilian!"

The other nodded comprehension of his warning. The Brazilian border was a long way south, as rivers ran; and no men from that country could conceivably have honest business up this far Venezuelan stream.

Pablo walked to the right corner. Hammond went to the left. Each passed around the angle he had chosen and scouted the sides and rear.

They met midway of the shady back wall. There they found another door, small, narrow and partly open. Inside, the snoring continued unbroken. Hammond shoved it smartly back, stooped, and entered.

THE SNORING stopped. From hammocks slung across the main room five heads started up. Swarthy faces, bearded, greasy, frowsy, gaped at him; faces of human mongrels, vicious, treacherous. For an instant all stared in stupefaction at the two big men with rifles who had thus sprung from nowhere.

"What are you doing here?" coldly demanded Hammond.

Retort came in snarling Portuguese—

"Who are you?"

The nearest man, a heavily built, foul smelling creature, lurched up from his hammock, gripping a machete which had lain beside him. He glowered at the intruders, eyes menacing as those of a cornered rat. The others, behind him, reached stealthily for their own weapons.

Bang!

A shot close beside Hammond made him jump. The report, in the confined space, deafened him. A lanky man among the *mestizos* toppled backward, shot through the head.

The clatter of Pablo's breechblock came faintly to the American's stunned ears. Then a spurt of flame licked out before him and another explosion smote his ear-drums. Another of the five reeled and fell.

Crooked teeth agleam in a grin of hate, the fellow with the machete sprang at Hammond. The American promptly shot him through the body, springing back as he did so. The bush knife swung down through the empty air where he had been. The bushman pitched on his face.

Pablo's rifle spat for the third time, just as another flash leaped at him from the hand of a negroid featured man across the room. At the same moment Hammond, dodging a knife hurled by the last of the gang, fired with swift precision. The two collapsed. One lay still. The other kicked a few times, then went limp.

The North and the South American looked around, seeking any other assailant. They found none. The door of a small room at the right stood open, and to this Hammond strode. Beyond he found no man; nothing but a small table and a couple of well filled sacks. Turning back, he found Pablo, poniard now in hand, moving from body to body and assuring himself that all bullet wounds were fatal.

The house reeked of powder gas. He passed to the front door, found it barred, unfastened it, threw it open. A gentle current of pure air drew in. He breathed deeply, then spoke to Pablo.

"You work fast, *hombre*," was his dry comment.

"*Sí*," tranquilly acknowledged the Orinocan. "In this territory he who shoots quickest lives longest. And these had to be shot at once. I have seen two of them before—this one and that." He pointed to his first and second victims. "They were murderers, torturers, everything beastly. These others could be no better. So I wasted no time."

"They had to have it," conceded the investigator.

He looked grimly at the machete fighter and the knife thrower, then around at the bare clay walls.

"Well," he added, "we certainly have taken possession, and thrown a lively house warming party besides. Now let's clean up the place and make ourselves at home."

CHAPTER III

THE INDIAN

AN HOUR after the "house warming" at the concealed habitation of the dead explorer, all trace of its usurpation by desperadoes was virtually obliterated.

The desperadoes themselves, borne one by one on the brawny back of Pablo, had journeyed to the bank of the Manapiare and there been flung out into the current. Their dirty hammocks had been burned; their firearms, fouled and pitted through neglect, cast into the cove; their knives, small and large, laid on a high shelf; their canoe paddles tossed outside. And the sacks in the small room had been emptied of their contents, which consisted entirely of articles which evidently had been left behind by the late master of the house, Dr. Thorpe.

Now, after looking over those articles, Hammond sat at a small table in the main room and frowned thoughtfully. They comprised things useful in camp or on trail, things which the roving malefactors could use in further travels, but nothing else. Of scientific instruments or similar indispensables to exploration there was no sign. Had these things been wantonly destroyed by the ignorant thieves? If not, where were they?

Thorpe, intending to return and resume work, would not have carried away such tools. He had not even taken out his notebooks. His report to the Northern geographers had been a carefully typed manuscript, accompanied by many photographs. But no typewriter or camera or memoranda had been found in the Trinidad room where he died. Thus all those things should be here.

Hammond turned to Pablo, who, resting on the sill of the rear door, was smoking and gazing meditatively at the woods.

"Pablo!"

"Señor?" The smoker turned his head.

"Suppose you lived here alone. Suppose you had to go down the Orinoco, and wished to make sure that certain things of

yours would be safe here while you were gone. What would you do with them?"

Pablo puffed a couple of times.

"What kind of things?" he inquired.

"Oh, instruments and papers of value."

Another slow puff. Then:

"I should wrap them in rubber cloth to keep them dry, and put them in a box—if I had one—and bury the box in this floor. Then I should tread on that place until it was as hard and smooth as the rest of the earth. Then there would be no sign that anything had been hidden."

Hammond slowly nodded, scanning the hard packed earth.

"That sounds sensible," he conceded. "Well, I think something is hidden here somewhere. Let's look."

They arose and tapped the floor with rifle butts. Pablo worked in the main room; Hammond in the small one. For a time only dull thwacks responded. Then Hammond's gun evoked a hollow note.

At the same time Pablo's tamping outside ceased. An instant later Pablo spoke gruffly.

"Ho, *indio!* What do you want?"

Hastily Hammond scraped a mark on the soil. Then he strode out, to stop short.

In the open rear doorway stood a young Indian, nude save for a tiny clout. From under his shock of coarse black hair his brown eyes stared in amazement at Pablo who, surprised but not alarmed, stood with rifle dangling loosely. At Hammond's appearance the aborigine turned a quick gaze on him, recoiled slightly, as if about to flee, then stood still. After a second or two he looked all around the room, perplexity plain on his expressive face; he stared anew at the strangers, and gradually drew back.

THE TWO men walked toward him. He retreated, limping with the right leg as he moved, keeping his attention riveted on them. Emerging, the river voyagers found no other person present. On the ground beside the door lay a slain *paují* and a huge *areguato*—curassow turkey and howling monkey—and against the wall leaned a long brazilwood bow and several cane arrows. The Indian pointed at the game in a placating way, then withdrew another step.

"Have no fear," said Hammond, quietly. "We are friends of Dr. Thorpe."

With the words he set his rifle beside the bow and stood empty handed.

At sound of that name and sight of the amicable disarmament, the Indian stood more at ease. His wary expression relaxed into partial assurance, though he still studied the outlander searchingly. Soft voiced, he asked—

"*Amigos?*"

"*Amigos,*" reassured Hammond. "And who are you?"

A momentary silence was followed by several syllables unintelligible to both listeners.

"Do you come to visit Dr. Thorpe?" the questioner tried again.

The young fellow's face brightened, but evidently only the last word was comprehensible to his mind. After a moment he moved his chin toward them and inquired—

"Tohp?"

"*Amigos de* Thorpe," nodded Hammond, pointing to himself and Pablo. "*Y usted?* And you?"

"*Amigo,*" readily assented the other, laying hand on his breast.

Then he looked all around, motioned toward the house, asked something in his own language. As before, his words carried no meaning; yet his question was partly understandable. He was asking what had become of somebody no longer there.

"Hm! Does he mean Thorpe or the outlaws?" puzzled Hammond.

"I think he is a slave of those *guapos,*" replied Pablo. "He acts like one; a new one, not altogether broken. Let me try to talk with him, señor. I have been among Indians often."

"All right. I have something else to do. But first—"

He beckoned. The Indian approached,

limping as before. Hammond stooped, examined the lame leg, found no wound. As he pressed the thigh muscles, though, the native gave a short grunt of pain. Feeling again, the investigator detected beneath the smooth skin a hard lump. The Indian voiced no further protest, but set his lips tight and breathed hard through his nose.

The American nodded and straightened up. The injury was temporary, but very painful, and caused by a hard kick or blow; the knotting of muscles known to athletes as "charley horse", which virtually cripples the victim for days or weeks. The fact that this man had been able to find and kill game while thus hurt was proof of both his stoicism and his trail craft.

"I can cure this," he told Pablo, "but it will take time. Now talk to him."

He walked back inside, picked up a short spade recently found in the bandits' loot, and began digging in the marked corner. Pablo, after setting both rifles inside, took his former seat on the sill. The Indian, unable to squat because of the stiffness of his leg, stood before him. By words, grunts, gestures, and expressions the two worked at exchange of thoughts.

A foot below the surface of the bedroom floor, Hammond's spade struck wood. Carefully uncovering the find, he saw it to be a slab forming a box top. When this was lifted he discovered within the buried box a number of packages wrapped, as Pablo had guessed, in rubberized cloth. Undone, they proved to be a small portable typewriter, a thin camera, a theodolite, an aneroid, several fat film albums, a number of well worn leather notebooks.

Upon these records he seized, disregarding a few other miscellaneous articles still unexamined. Each notebook was crammed with short sentences inscribed in minute characters with lead pencil: the crowded writing of a man who had seen much and recorded his observations in the most compact form. Many of the words, in fact, were so abbreviated as to form virtually a private code. The whole series of jottings comprised a voluminous mass of facts, surmises, deductions, and occasional whimsical remarks which would necessitate attentive reading.

CARRYING the chronicles, he returned to the main room. Then Pablo leisurely arose and reentered. The Indian hobbled in after him.

"Señor, it is as I thought," announced the examiner. "This Indian has been a slave to the *guapos*. He is of the Yavarano tribe, which lives far up this Rio Manapiare. He came down the river with three others in the short canoe we found at the port. They made a camp at this house. The *guapos* surprised them here, shot two of them, and made the others their slaves. Then they whipped one to death because he angered them in some way. This is the only one left. He has been the hunter, bringing in their meat. He has been out since this morning, hunting slowly because of his lameness. Now he asks if you can cure his hurt and if he can stay with us until he is well. He says he likes you."

"I told you I could cure him. And he certainly can stay."

The Northerner surveyed the abused youth again. Although gaunt from recent hardships, he was well muscled and symmetrical; his features were regular, his eyes intelligent and friendly. Despite lingering diffidence, he stood meeting the white man's gaze without evasion, and in his bearing was no cringe.

"In fact," added Hammond, "I might not let him go at present if he wished to. I may want to use him."

"That was my thought also, señor. I think he will be most useful."

So prompt was his agreement that his employer gave him a quizzical look. Although the Venezuelan always did whatever was necessary without complaint, he was not particularly fond of work; and the Indian, notwithstanding his lameness, could do many small jobs which otherwise would devolve on the pilot. Reading

his superior's thought, Pablo grinned, unabashed.

"What do you know about his tribe?" asked Hammond.

"They are a good race, the Yavaranos. They are fighters when angered, and they have little to do with white men. One must handle them carefully. Yet some of them have worked at times for rubber men in the *balata* forests, and those who did so were reliable if well treated."

"Good. Did they know Dr. Thorpe?"

"Not well, this one says. They knew him by name as a good man, but only a few who came down here on hunting trips ever met him. His own Indians were Maquiritares, from up the Rio Ventuari. The Maquiritares and the Yavaranos are friendly, but the doctor's men would never go far up this river because there was fighting among the tribes at its head."

Hammond nodded.

"Yes, I know. Thorpe left this part of his work until the last. Well, give our man a knife and tell him to dress the meat and cook it. Tell him to heat water, too, so that I can start to cure his leg. You go and bring up everything in our boat."

"*Bien.*"

Pablo took one of the Brazilian knives from the shelf, motioned to the Indian, and walked out. Hammond watched the two make their exit, then stepped to the half-open front door and swung it wide. The sun had sunk low, but its light still was powerful enough to flood the room. Back at the table, he filled a pipe and opened a notebook.

"Now," said he, "let's see if there's anything here that will help in hunting down that flying fool of a Greenleaf."

CHAPTER IV

BURIED WORDS

THREE days passed peacefully. Meanwhile Hammond learned many things about the wilderness into which he had so confidently plunged, but nothing about the missing aviator.

Each entry in the notebook was dated; so the reader, by arranging the books in chronological sequence, was able to follow the travels of the man who had lived there before him. And, though many of the notations were so abridged as to be almost undecipherable, others were much more full and clear. The short ones frequently were written in evident haste, and had presumably been jotted down while the writer was traveling on river or trail. The longer ones were set down by a steadier hand, as if the recorder had sat at a table—probably this very table at headquarters—and, with plenty of time at his disposal, had chronicled thoughts as well as cold facts. One such, early in the first volume, read in part:

> Manapiare exploration must be delayed. Maquiritares report trouble up this river among three different tribes: Yavaranos, Curacichanos, Uayciaros. Y's and C's are good people, they say, when not in warlike mood; but U's are a bad lot and keep the trouble pot simmering. All are averse to white men. The U's are very savage, and give a stranger no chance to explain that he is *simpático*. Worse yet, all the Manapiare Indians consider their mountains sacred—homes of the gods—and stand ready to kill any one attempting to measure them. So I must work into their country gradually, sending messages by any Indians who pass by. Meanwhile I'll go south of the Ventuari where, my boys say, I can operate with better chance of success at present. There's no sense in getting myself killed at the start. My job is to keep alive and send home reports . . .

Succeeding entries showed that in the ensuing two years the explorer had worked in regions south of the Ventuari, eastward at the headwaters of the Ventuari itself, westward in the country of the poison making Piaroas, but never far up this river on which he made his lonely home. Several notations showed that he had cruised for some distance up the Manapiare and measured a number of heights along the way, then turned back. Each of these ended:

> More intertribal war up above. No use in going farther now.

And, in the last book, the final words were:

> Going down Orinoco tomorrow. Will send home latest reports, then return and clean up this Manapiare. Have covered everything else in the Ventuari drainage system and sent records to the Society. (Wonder if anybody up there has read them yet!) Now I'll reach that sacred mountain, Umtucu, and investigate the ethnology thereabouts, or die trying. That region has kept me out long enough. I am going in!

Blank pages ensued. Thorpe had not lived to carry out his resolution. The unwritten record of the Manapiare headwaters must be set down by the hands which now held the book, if by any one.

Those hands closed that book gently and laid it down.

"Thorpe, old chap," he said quietly, "I never saw you, but after reading your stuff I'm game to try finishing your job for you. I'm not in your class, but if I can find out how to use your instruments I'll measure everything worth measuring as I go. And I'll learn all I can and write it down. Greenleaf's been dead a long time, of course, and the chances are that in this huge wilderness I'll never locate his bones. But, by all the gods, I'll have a look at that god mountain he flew over! And if I can I'll climb it!"

AT INTERVALS during those days of research Hammond also questioned the Indian, whose name, as pronounced by himself, was Chuku. Conversations were slow and laborious, carried on through the manual and oral interpretations of Pablo, who himself was often at a loss in his efforts to communicate inquiry and answer. When Chuku understood what was wanted, however, he replied readily enough. The kindness of his present masters was so marked a contrast to the brutality of his captors that even a mind much more dull and dour than his could hardly have failed to appreciate it and respond.

Of his own country he said it was far to the north, where three rivers ran together to make the Manapiare. There were great "hills of thunder", on which lived terrible gods which must not be angered. Of these mountains the one called Umtucu was much the largest. This must not be approached. Otherwise the thunder gods would destroy those who dared their wrath.

The tribes living in that region were three in number—the three named in Thorpe's notebook—and the Uayciaros were frequently at war with the other two. They were marauders who knew no friends. As for white men, they were not welcome visitors. The Indians never went out to attack whites, but they wanted none in their own country. Many years ago roving Spaniards had come in there with guns, and had repaid Indian hospitality by outraging Indian women and abusing Indian men. And, though those white men had long been dead, the tradition of their brutality still lived.

Hammond, hearing this, nodded understandingly. Before coming to South America he had read of the unspeakable deeds perpetrated on the natives by the Spanish *conquistadores*. More recently he had come to comprehend that to these wild people the Spaniard was the only kind of white man known, and that, naturally enough, they supposed all other whites to be of the same type.

"Then no white man has come into your country in a long time?" he quizzed.

The Indian eyes narrowed. The Indian mouth closed.

"That is not a good question, señor," said Pablo, on second thought. "Two years ago the Yavaranos killed some *mestizos* who came in on a slave hunt. But no Indian will ever admit to white men that he or his people have killed men white or half white."

"I see. Well, let's be more direct. Chuku, did not a thunder bird fly off the mountain Umtucu last year? And was not a white man on its back?"

Chuku's lips tightened still more. He looked blankly at the wall, feigning in-

comprehension. After regarding him a moment Hammond remarked:

"Questions about the gods seem to be out of order."

"*Sí.* And when an Indian will not answer a question he will not," declared Pablo. "So we may as well save our breath."

And Hammond, though irritated, saved it. Plainly any further interrogation on such subjects would be a waste of time.

Now, after finishing his study of the Thorpe records, he smoked awhile, then turned to his men, who lounged in their hammocks.

"Come here," he bade.

They came. He glanced again at the notebooks, studied Chuku, and declared:

"Chuku, you know that some white men are not cruel. So do your people. They knew Doctor Thorpe to be a good man. They know that some rubber dealers are good men. Otherwise they would not have worked for those men."

"That is so," assented the Yavarano, when Pablo had translated.

"Very well. And your people are now at peace. If they were not, you and your friends would not have journeyed down here."

"True," acknowledged the Indian.

"And now you would like to return to them."

"Yes."

"All right. In another day we will start for your country. When we reach it, you shall tell your people that we are good men."

"I will," readily promised Chuku.

"*Bien.* Now let us sleep."

So they slept: Hammond in the little room, with door shut but with window wide to the night breezes; the Venezuelan and the Indian at opposite ends of the large room. Although friends, the two natives of the same country were separated by racial instincts many generations old, and each rested more easily beyond arm's reach of the other. It will never be otherwise.

CHAPTER V

WARRIORS

THREE men in a boat crept doggedly up a river of mystery.

Behind them—far behind, now—a silent house stood forlorn in a little clearing, facing toward a screened port, awaiting the return of men who might or might not come back. Down in the narrow harbor a motor launch lay resting after a long journey, powerless to advance much farther against the sullen currents. Its tanks were empty, its few final cans of fuel stored in the house. Rather than drive the faithful vessel to its limit upstream and then leave it hopelessly stranded at some exposed spot, its master had chosen to let it remain in a safer berth. Now he and his companions were navigating a dugout canoe into the unknown north.

As on previous days, caste and convention were disregarded. By custom, the señor should have ridden in idle dignity amidships; Pablo, river captain, should have held the honored position of *patrón*, or steersman, far aft; and Indian or mestizo boatmen should have done the manual labor of propelling the boat. Instead, the lone Yavarano held the post of navigator, his partly cured leg lying comfortably before him; and both the señor and his guide wielded paddles or poles, as the river grew deep or shallow.

The canoe was the small one in which Chuku and his friends had come down from their country. The paddles were those of the dead marauders, with big spade shaped blades which gave maximum power to every stroke. The baggage amidships weighed approximately as much as a fourth man. So the craft rode well, and in the past four days it had covered at least half a hundred miles against the downward flow.

Hammond, his lightly bronzed skin now red from fresh sunburn, swung paddle or pole with evident enjoyment, which seemed never to lessen. Sweat soaked his clothes and dripped from his chin; mosquitoes assailed his undefended

face and puffed it with itchy poison; knuckles cracked open from the intensity of the sun; but, with helmet tilted back to protect the base of his brain, he worked hour after hour, voicing occasional short jests to the silently toiling Pablo or smiling back at the intent Chuku, who responded with slow grins. From time to time he paused briefly to look at a compass lying on a box top and make a note in Thorpe's unfinished book. Then he resumed his swing.

More than once in the course of the journey the trio passed bold, precipitous hills or mountains which shot up from nearly level ground and stood isolated, sheer sided, inaccessible, daring any passer-by to come and kill himself in attempts to scale them. To each of these Chuku, when questioned, gave a name; and each name was found by Hammond to be recorded in Thorpe's books, together with the estimated height of the summit. These elevations, he had learned from the records, had been measured by use of the theodolite; so he had brought that instrument with him. Now, making camps not far from two or three of the abrupt hills already measured, he experimented with the scientific tool, accepting Pablo's judgment of the intervening distance and carefully noting the degree of elevation required. Thus he arrived, after numerous computations, at an approximately correct method of using it, and felt himself more or less competent to take measurements of the mountains to be met farther north.

"It's dead reckoning, I suppose, just as the navigation of the old time sea captains was," he once told himself. "But those old-timers usually made port. And anybody up home who doesn't like my figures can come down and make his own."

Dimly blue, but daily growing less dim and more dark, a huge square mountain grew in the northern sky. Each morning at daybreak it stood massive and menacing; then, as the heat mist spread abroad, it faded, becoming more and more indistinct. Yet, as the laborious day wore on, it gradually expanded, rising, broadening, until the late afternoon stop at a new camp site found it more immense. This was Umtucu, lord of the region, sacred home of the gods, whence had leaped the blazing thunder bird.

Whether the precipitous sides of that great bulk could be ascended was a question as yet unanswerable. But, if that should prove impossible, the adventurer was determined both to search the country around its southern base and to measure its height, thus fulfilling his own mission and completing the work of the dead Thorpe. Of these intentions, however, he gave no hint to Chuku, or, as yet, even to Pablo.

Yet he prepared the mind of Chuku for his ultimate observation of the god mountain. As new heights were met along the way, he took their altitudes, giving the Indian the impression that he was only looking at them through a tube which gave him magic vision. Some of those heights had gods of their own. But no manifestations of wrath came from them, so the young Yavarano logically concluded that the peerings of the stranger at their abodes were not resented.

SO THE days broke, blazed, blurred, and ended in swift night. Each day the sacred Umtucu grew more lofty and majestic. Each night the men found themselves rougher and harder in appearance. Both had grown thin cheeked from the constant labor, and leaner of frame as well. Hammond's red skin had darkened to a russet brown; Pablo, too, was several shades more swarthy than at the start. On both of them the harsh wilderness was imprinting its mark, carving their faces with new lines, molding their bodies into more bony forms, toughening them for what might lie beyond. Even Chuku, as he drew nearer to home, seemed to smile less readily and grow more grim.

Then, without warning from the taciturn Indian, the white travelers found themselves among his people. The sun

stood near the zenith, and the muscular motive power was operating with mechanical swing, when another canoe appeared from around a curve. After it, a half score of other dugouts slid into sight in rapid succession. Each was filled with men. Each came on without call or signal from any of its crew. So purposeful was the advance that both Hammond and Pablo dropped poles and stooped for guns. But then behind them sounded a quick warning.

"Ugh-ugh!" sharply grunted Chuku. That double grunt, they knew, meant "No!"

As they looked at him, he lifted his paddle high overhead, wagged it sidewise in greeting, and brought it again to the water. Then he arose and made cryptic motions with one hand. The hard faced savages in the war fleet watched him, motionless, until he calmly sat again. Thereupon the fifty or sixty blades in the Yavarano vessels reached sidewise into the air, poised rigidly a second, dropped to the surface, and halted the curved logs as if anchors had been cast overboard. The flotilla lay a pistol-shot away, waiting for the white men to approach.

"Mmmp!" grunted Chuku, stroking with his big stern paddle.

The other two accepted his inarticulate order and recommenced poling. The Yavaranos, they noticed, lifted no weapons from the bottoms of their own boats.

As the polers reached the leading dugout, a lanky, keen eyed Indian seated amidships grunted a monosyllable. At once the crew swung the heavy shell and began paddling upstream. The others waited and, as the white men passed them, closed in behind. Every eye surveyed the intruders critically, but not one face betrayed either hostility or friendliness. Nor did any Yavarano call a question to Chuku. The convoy and the ominous escort proceeded as silently as they had met.

About a half hour later they turned in at the mouth of a sizable creek, heavily jungled, but deep and clean. And, perhaps half a mile up this stream, they stopped at a small cleared space whence a crooked path led up a forested hillside.

There the thin Indian stepped ashore, spoke three curt words to Chuku, and walked away up the hill, outwardly ignoring the white men. His aloofness brought to Hammond's lips a thin smile.

"The chief, I suppose," he remarked.

"*Sí, señor,*" confirmed Pablo. "He goes now to stand before his house and give us a formal reception, as if he had not seen us before now. Chuku will take us to him. Then we— *Cra!* Somebody should stay and watch our baggage."

He scowled at the Indians, then at the vital canned food, the little trunk containing Thorpe's instruments and records, the other equipment packed amidships. Hammond solved his quandary.

"You stay," he ordered. "If they're going to kill us they'll kill us, whether we are together or not."

"But—" expostulated the Venezuelan.

"But nothing! Stay here!"

Pablo, frowning, sat again. Hammond turned to Chuku. The latter promptly led the way up the path, which opened into a wide clearing where stood a huge circular house, clay walled, with conical roof of palm thatch. After them came the crews, bearing bows, arrows, blowguns, javelins, poisoned darts. The Venezuelan, rifle across thighs, was left sitting alone. Not one Yavarano remained. Correctly interpreting his looks at them, the tribesmen scornfully made plain the fact that they were not thieves.

At the low door of the community house waited the lanky chief, arms folded, face impassive. Beside him stood two sub-chiefs, hard mouthed, watchful, but unarmed. Nowhere else was visible any living creature. Women and children were hidden away somewhere within the tribe house.

HAMMOND stopped before the primitive ruler, fronting him squarely. For a moment white man and brown looked deep into each other's eyes. Then Hammond smiled and extended his right hand.

A flitting glimmer of light dawned and died in the visage of the chief. Slowly he unfolded his sinewy arms, and awkwardly he met the grip. It was plain that he was not accustomed to that mode of greeting, but not averse to meeting friendly overtures.

As the hands parted, the chief muttered a few syllables to Chuku, moving his jaw toward an open sided hut, empty, near at hand. To this the youth walked, followed by the American and all the tribesmen. Inside hung a hammock, in which Hammond sat down, removing his helmet to fan his hot face. At once every eye scanned him anew, registering fresh impressions of him now that his head was no longer half hidden by the big hat. Gazing impersonally back at them, he found their visages unreadable.

The slim chief squatted. His counselors assumed the same comfortable attitude. Chuku, still a bit stiff muscled, although his lameness was almost gone, remained standing. The others, ranging in close ranks under the eaves of the square hut, looked and listened. Then the sole survivor of the four young rovers who had gone forth began to talk.

Motionless, monotonous, he stood relating his experiences. The faces of the auditors changed as he went on. Scowls and hardening of mouths betrayed rage at the cruelty of the outlaws. A concerted stare at the American showed that the deaths of those outlaws had been disclosed. A fading of harshness became noticeable as the narrator rubbed his injured thigh and moved his head slightly toward the lounging white man. When the concise tale ended, all looked in friendly fashion at the American; all but the chief, whose expression had not once altered.

Now that primitive potentate asked several succinct questions. At each reply he looked meditatively at the ground, giving no sign of his thoughts. At length he voiced several words, and Chuku walked out.

Minutes passed. Then came a disturbance of the Indians along the river side of the hut. Through them, roughly aggressive, came Pablo, rifle in hand.

"You sent for me, señor?" he demanded.

Hammond looked at him oddly, then nodded. He comprehended that Chuku had been ordered by the chief to send Pablo up here for inspection; also, that the Venezuelan would not have obeyed the summons unless he had supposed it to come from his own commander.

"Sit down and take it easy," he instructed. "These people only wish to look at you again. All goes well."

"*Bien.*"

Pablo sat, laid his gun on the ground, put his feet on it, and coolly regarded the surrounding Yavaranos. The chief and the sub-chiefs scrutinized him searchingly. In their judicial eyes glimmered hereditary hostility to Spaniards, tempered by realization of the facts that this one was treated almost as an equal by the humane outlander; that, though truculent at entrance, he had laid down his gun after reassurance by his own chief; that he had been invited to sit beside that chief, who thereby vouched for him. After a long, penetrating look into his honest face and unswerving eyes they were satisfied.

The chief arose. The sub-chiefs stood with him. The lanky aborigine spoke quietly, looking aside at his men. Then from one of those men, hitherto voiceless, sounded words in apocopated but intelligible Spanish.

"You are welcome. You may stay here. You may hang your hammocks in this house. That is all."

"*Bueno!*" responded Hammond. "That is enough. Let our belongings be brought from the canoe and placed here at once."

"It shall be done."

And promptly it was done. The meager baggage of the strangers was borne up the slope. Hammocks were hung. A clay pot of mingled fish and meat and a huge bunch of plantains were brought and laid on the floor. Thereupon Pablo smiled and said:

"Señor, we are accepted as friends, in a place where no strangers have, to my knowledge, been made friends before

now. We are lucky. But we must be careful. Indians are queer. Their friendship may suddenly change to enmity. And when it does—"

His right forefinger touched the left side of his neck. In the Orinoco region that gesture signifies the cutting of a throat.

CHAPTER VI

CHALLENGE

A WEEK after the arrival of the amateur explorer among the untamed men of the unknown headwaters, the throat cutting hinted at by Pablo had not yet come about. Indeed, it seemed less likely than at the time of the first landing.

Within ten minutes after the acceptance of the newcomers as friends, the hitherto invisible women and children of the Yavaranos had emerged from the tribe house and, though feigning to ignore the presence of the bearded men, had seen them and allowed themselves to be seen. The women wore only tiny aprons of bark cloth a few inches square; the children went entirely nude. After surveying them, Hammond dryly remarked—

"I'm glad we didn't come here seeking romance."

"*Sí*," grinned Pablo. "A man might think these women beautiful if he were so cross eyed that he could see only his own nose, but not otherwise."

Facially the women were, in truth, far from attractive; flat featured, narrow eyed, heavy jawed, and generally unintelligent in expression. Most of them were also asymmetric of figure, their torsos and arms looking too heavy for their skinny legs. Two or three girls were blessed with shapely forms, but not with pretty faces. Compared with their athletic menfolk, they were an inferior lot.

Hammond chuckled in appreciation of his assistant's jest, and thereafter gave no attention to the wilderness women—except, at times, to snap photographs of them engaged in some typical occupation such as shredding cassava roots or baking *manioc*. At first these film shots were taken surreptitiously. Then, learning that the Yavaranos had no antipathy to the camera, he abandoned stealth and openly photographed whatever scenes struck his fancy.

In this work, as well as in gathering information about the people and their region, he received unexpected assistance from the man who had surprised him by speaking Spanish, and who called himself by a Spanish name, Renato. Several years older than Chuku, this Indian was also more experienced. He had traveled widely in his own land, worked for a rubber dealer on the upper Orinoco, acquired a fair knowledge of "bush" Spanish, and also developed a strong liking for the presents which might be obtained from white men. In general, his nature was both inquisitive and acquisitive. Now, after a talk with Chuku, he attached himself unbidden to the tall visitors, actuated both by curiosity and by hope of reward. Somewhere he had learned that a camera was harmless; and, by informing his people of this fact, he made it easy for the investigator to obtain as many pictures as he desired.

He answered most of the white man's questions concerning the customs of his people, the other tribes of the Manapiare headwaters, and the mountains and streams along which they lived. Each inquiry was given deliberate consideration, however, before the reply was forthcoming, and occasionally he gave no reply at all. At such times he simply looked straight ahead of him, as if meditating about something else.

Most of the matters which he thus kept secret pertained directly or indirectly to his gods. And, like Chuku, he withheld answer to all questions about the thunder bird which had flown from the god mountain. At length Hammond growled in exasperation:

"I'd love to kick that dummy until his teeth fell out! Maybe he would talk then."

Pablo chuckled, but shook his head.

"I have often felt the same way toward Indians," he replied. "But, as I told you long ago, when they will not talk they will not. Kicks, blows, knives, bullets, even fire, will not make them tell what they choose to keep secret."

"M-hm. But how could Doctor Thorpe have heard that story, if these people are so dumb to us?"

"Probably through his Maquiritares. Some wandering Indian told the tale to them, and one of them happened to feel like repeating it to his employer. These people always do what they feel like doing."

"M-hm," repeated the other, thoughtfully. "Well, perhaps if I should sweeten that fellow with a gift or two he might feel like telling me what he is holding back. For instance, a knife of those Brazilian toughs, which I brought along in the trunk, might—"

"Señor, do not do it!" counseled the river veteran. "That is just what he is playing for. I have seen Indians like him before. He has talked with Chuku and learned that you have knives, which are much more precious to these people than gold, because they make arrowheads from the blades. And the moment he gets a knife from you he will cease to be interested in us, and you will learn nothing further from him."

Thus passed days. Then Hammond grew restless.

TO THE north, forbidding yet challenging, stood Umtucu, shrouded in mist and mystery. Clouds floated along its sides and crept about its top, opening now and then to give brief, tantalizing glimpses, closing again to baffle prying eyes. Though comparatively near, it seemed more remote and inaccessible than ever; for during the past few days it had become very evident that any effort to set foot on it was likely to be violently opposed by the warlike men who revered and feared it. Moreover, it was obvious that those men were numerous and pugnacious enough to annihilate the two gunmen whenever aroused. But now, as the great block silently taunted the atom of humanity who had worked so hard to come near it, Hammond's mouth hardened in renewed resolution.

"Somewhere between you and me, big boy, lies what is left of Greenleaf," he muttered. "And don't fool yourself. I'm coming to you!"

Only Pablo, lounging near, overheard. Renato had turned aside to voice some short remark to Chuku, squatting beside him.

"Perhaps, señor," he suggested, "we could reach that mountain without much work by us or suspicion by the Indians."

"How?"

"I do not know just how. But I once knew a rubber dealer who liked to go into queer places and see new things. He would tell the Indians he was hunting new rubber forests or seeking labor for the next season. And they believed him and helped him to travel. So he learned much which would have been kept from him if the wild people had known his real object. Now if you could think of some excuse to go yonder which would not make these men oppose us they might aid us. Otherwise—"

He touched his jugular vein as if rubbing a mosquito bite.

Hammond studied the squatting pair, who were again watching his face. Then he looked again at the god mountain, yawned and indifferently remarked:

"I keep forgetting the name of that mountain. What is it?"

"Um-tu-cu," carefully pronounced Renato.

"Ah, *sí*. Umtucu, the god mountain. Do any men live near it?"

A silence, quite prolonged. Then—

"Uayciaros."

"Eh? It is in the Uayciaro country?"

"*Sí*."

"Oho! And are the Uayciaros not afraid of it, that they live so near it?"

A scowl came over Renato's face.

"They are animals!" he asserted. "They do not know enough to fear it."

"Humph! Then why do not the gods of Umtucu teach them to fear it, or destroy them?"

"The gods know they are stupid animals. The gods do not destroy animals for being stupid. The gods are the gods of men!"

The Northerner eyed him, revolving that assertion in his mind.

"Oh, I see. The gods punish a man who approaches them, because he does what he knows to be wrong. But they do not punish a creature too stupid to know it is wrong. Is that it?"

Renato, after a moment of mental debate, agreed—

"That is right."

The big, bearded man laughed down at him, deliberately derisive.

"I don't believe you," he bluntly declared. "I think the Uayciaros are braver men than you Yavaranos. They dare to live near Umtucu, while you people live far away because you are afraid of it. Or perhaps it is because you are afraid of the Uayciaros! Yes, I think that is the real reason. And the gods know it. The gods do not hurt the Uayciaros because they know them to be not afraid. If they hurt you, it is because they know you are cowards. Gods despise cowards."

"Umph!" grunted Pablo, sitting straighter and glancing toward his rifle. Anger, rapidly mounting, was visible in the face of the Yavarano.

"That is a lie!" abruptly growled Renato, leaping to his feet.

Hammond laughed again, sneeringly.

"So you say," he retorted. "But words prove nothing. I have heard before now that you Yavaranos were afraid of the Uayciaros, and now I believe it. If you are not, then prove it to me by going into the Uayciaro country. I dare to go there alone, with only my partner here as my companion, if you fear to go with me. We two fear no men. We came up this river to learn who were the bravest men on it. And I don't believe your people are the bravest. Now I will go tomorrow to meet those Uayciaros and learn how brave they are. Come with us if you dare."

Renato stood glowering at him, his expression a curious mixture of wrath and perplexity; wrath over the white man's jeers, perplexity as to what to do or say in response. Large in his mind loomed the presents which he had not yet received, but which he still hoped to get; and, though momentarily enraged, he did not wish to forfeit them. After a moment, however, his temper got the better of him.

"I dare go anywhere," he growled. "So do all of us. But I do not go anywhere for nothing. I want presents. And I will have them!"

So truculent was his tone that Hammond's face hardened.

"Oh, will you?" he retorted. "And how will you get them?"

The Yavarano stood nonplused. For that belligerent question he had no answer ready. Before the probing gaze of the steely eyes he grew more and more uncomfortable, visioning the loss of the gifts he might have had by remaining civil.

"None of us can go with you unless our chief permits it," he sullenly evaded. "If we do go we should have presents. And I should have a present now. I have been useful to you."

"POSSIBLY," conceded the visitor. "I may give you something if I happen to feel like it. But if you need presents to make you brave, that is another matter. Bah! You and your people are traders, not fighters. As for your chief, go and tell him what I have said. And tell him that no talking will convince me. If you people have courage, let me see a few of you prove it by going with us against the Uayciaros. If you have none, stay here with your women, and we shall go our way. Tomorrow morning we start."

He turned his back and began filling his pipe. Forthwith Renato stalked out, walking with short, stiff steps.

Behind him, much puzzled, went Chuku, to listen to Renato's report to the chief and learn what had been discussed.

Left alone, the two big men regarded each other quizzically. Hammond finished loading the pipe, ignited the tobacco, blew smoke.

"Well, I think that will bring some action," he declared.

"*Sí*, truly. We shall soon be on our way to the gods or to the devil," cheerfully affirmed the other. "These people are too proud to sit still after such a kick as that."

Both looked at the tribe house, which remained ominously quiet. After a few slow puffs the smoker turned his back to it and leaned against a corner post, gazing at the mountain. For a long time he stood there, silent.

The sun set. A withered woman brought food. Pablo spoke, and his employer came, squatted, and ate. Swift darkness spread. The two lay down in their hammocks, loosened belts and, with guns within quick reach, relaxed.

No male Indian had come near them since the departure of Renato and Chuku. What was going on in the tribe house they could not know. But there was little use in lying awake; so, trusting to luck, they soon dozed away into sleep.

CHAPTER VII

DEFIANCE

SUN SMOTE Umtucu, creeping rapidly from its flat crest down its convex sides. It flooded the Yavarano settlement, the creek, the river. At the first impact of its heat the two men in the open hut sat up and looked about. A moment later a door in the curved wall of the tribe house opened, and several Indians emerged, to stop just outside and stand watching the whites.

"Well, we haven't yet gone to the gods or the devil," yawned Hammond. "But we're going somewhere with no further delay. So let's pick up our baggage and show these fellows we mean business."

"*Bien.*"

The riverman began to unlash one end of his hammock, keeping an eye on the group at the door. The observant Yavaranos muttered to one another. Two of them turned quickly and reentered. By the time the hanging bed had been loosed, the chief himself had come to the door. He stood there a moment watching the obvious preparations for departure. Then he faded back into the dimness of the interior. The others followed him.

"They mean business too, of some kind," declared Pablo.

"Looks like it. And it won't be long now."

For the next quarter of an hour nothing developed. The old woman who had been acting as waitress brought a flat basket filled with a bountiful breakfast. At sight of her both felt more at ease. It seemed hardly probable that the Indians would feed men whom they meant to attack.

While she waited, they ate heartily. Then Hammond unlocked his trunk, drew out a necklace of gaudy glass beads and, to her surprise and delight, hung it around her wrinkled neck. Worth perhaps ten cents in civilization, it was, to her, a priceless reward for her services. No other woman there, not even the most attractive, possessed such a prize; and the fact that she was far past the age when any man of her own tribe would give her anything enhanced its value. After standing stupefied for a full minute, she grinned and hastened houseward to make all the other women envious.

"Wait!" called Hammond. "Send Chuku and Renato. Chuku! Renato! *Comprende?*"

She gabbled the names after him and hurried on. The explorer selected from his belongings one of the Brazilian knives, a big bandanna, and a box of matches; the knife as a gift to Chuku, who had been so faithful a guide and hunter, and the bright cloth and the fire-sticks as presents to Renato who, although recently rude, deserved something for his previous help-

fulness. Very soon the two Yavaranos appeared, to find the visitors purposefully assembling their equipment.

Without words, the Northerner handed over the rewards. Chuku beamed at his steel treasure. Renato eyed it covetously, then looked with evident dissatisfaction at his own cheaper presents.

"To men who do something I give good things," announced the donor. "To those who only squat and talk, not so much. Now carry our goods to our canoe. We go to visit the brave Uayciaros, as I said we would."

Without reply, Renato turned and stalked back to the house.

"Humph!" grunted Hammond. Then, with a shrug, he gestured to Chuku, who willingly picked up the designated bundle.

Pablo stooped to lift the little trunk, but straightened without touching it, eyes fixed again on the tribe house. From the opening in the clay wall came a sudden flux of men; men carrying bows, arrows, blowguns, spears and hardwood war axes. They were headed by the hard eyed chief and Renato.

"Humph!" repeated Hammond, putting hand to his pistol butt. Pablo stretched an arm aloft and took his rifle from the poles on which it lay.

Outside the door, however, the armed men paused. Only two of them came to the hut. These were the chief and the interpreter.

"Well, what is in your minds now?" challenged Hammond.

"It is in our minds," coolly replied Renato, without translating the question to his chief, "to journey to the Uayciaro country!"

"What? All of you?"

"All of us!"

"Ho-ho! So you wish to prove yourselves brave, do you? Or are you all seeking presents? If so, I do not want so many men."

This time Renato repeated the utterance in his own language. The chief replied in a grating tone.

"We go," loftily asserted the man of two tongues, "because we choose to go. You have nothing to do with it. We want no presents from you. We will take our reward from our enemies, the Uayciaros, and prove to them that we are their masters!"

"Oh. I see." The Northerner grinned at the offended chief. "In that case you may all come with us, if you like. You may be useful to us. And if the Uayciaros are not easily conquered our guns may be very useful to you."

"*Sí*. We know that," was the naive retort.

"Very well. Then let us spend no more time in talk."

THE CHIEF growled again. Half a dozen young warriors passed their weapons to others, came forward, hoisted the equipment of the impudent outlanders to their heads or shoulders, and took the path to the canoe harbor. Chuku hurried houseward to get his own arms. The white men, with rifles across shoulders, sauntered down the path. Behind them came the Yavarano fighters, stern faced, tight mouthed, yet eager eyed. The chief lingered behind a few minutes to give final instructions to several older men, too old for a war trail, who must remain at home.

After the warriors came boys, staggering under the weight of dozens of paddles. And after the boys trudged women bearing baskets of cassava and other travel foods, as well as the hammocks in which their men must sleep. Only the few old people and the tiny children remained idle. All others were busy starting the expedition on its way.

In orderly confusion the men boarded their respective boats, received their paddles from the boys, stowed their food and their beds out of the way, took their seats, and awaited the signal to go. The chief now had arrived and taken command. By his direction, the white men were seated amidships of a long craft carrying eight paddlers.

"We must not paddle, señor," cautioned

Pablo. "White men must not work among Indians."

"That is a great hardship for you," bantered his employer.

"Work wears a man out," countered the other. "A man should not wear himself out unless he must."

"There's something in that."

They chuckled together and settled themselves comfortably.

The chief, now in the middle of his own canoe, looked over the flotilla and spoke curtly. His paddlers stroked in unison. The boat moved out. Behind it came the vessel of the white men, who carried the useful guns. The rest fell into line. Without a backward look, the warriors left their women standing on the shore and headed for the river and the land of their enemies.

The anchorage faded away. Bushes obliterated the watching women. The banks slid past rapidly. Then the expedition shot out into the Manapiare, swerved to head upstream, and swam steadily toward the dread mountain of the gods.

CHAPTER VIII

SUPERSTITION

THREE days passed without sight or sound of the Uayciaros.

They were days of dogged paddling against the current, of laborious poling and hauling through small but difficult rapids, of cautious camping and constant alertness. Only at sundown did vigilance cease. Yet the watchfulness of the warriors was not that of men on guard against attack. Rather it was the intent stealth of hunters who feared only that their quarry might detect their approach and outwit them.

On the second day they turned from their own Manapiare to ascend a new stream, called the Paré, which the passengers understood to be the river of the Uayciaros. The course thereafter was mainly northwest, leading directly toward the western side of Umtucu.

Although the Yavaranos apparently had never before journeyed up this river, their chief showed unerring judgment in picking his way through the barriers of rocks and white waters. And notwithstanding the previous assertions of both Chuku and Renato that Umtucu must not be approached on pain of death, neither they nor their comrades betrayed fear of it as they drew nearer. At times one or the other of them eyed it soberly, but any misgiving which he might feel was concealed behind an unchanged countenance.

At length Hammond bantered Renato on this point. Said he:

"Either you are all very brave men or you have been cowards to fear Umtucu so long. The gods are doing nothing to stop us. You could have come here long ago."

"No!" disputed the Indian. "We are not cowards. But it was not the will of the gods to let us approach before. Now they are willing."

"Oh, are they? And why should they be?"

"Because we come to fight the Uayciaro animals. If we came only because of impudence, the gods would crush us."

"Uh-huh. But why are they now willing to let you attack the Uayciaros?"

"Because it is our right. The Uayciaros have attacked us more than once. It is right for us to attack them in return. The gods know we are right. So they will let us pass."

"How do you know they will?"

"The old wise men at home say so."

"Oh, I see."

The explorer glanced at the saturnine chief, and saw more than he mentioned. These Yavaranos had been at peace for some time and grown rather weary of it. His own taunts, calculated to shame a few men into coming with him as guides and boatmen, had brought to a hot blaze the war fire smoldering in all hearts. The chief himself was not averse to reprisals on his marauding neighbors; he was stung by the white man's outspoken accusation

of cowardice; he knew how helpful the rifles of the strangers would be in primitive battle. The "old wise men" also understood all these factors. And, since they themselves did not have to go and labor and fight, it had been easy enough for them to predict complaisance of the gods. Hammond had been wondering a bit at the wholesale response to his impromptu challenge. Now he comprehended all the reasons.

"Yes, you are brave men," he acknowledged. "But none of you is brave enough to climb Umtucu and meet your gods face to face."

The Indian's eyes widened with a look akin to horror.

"That can not be done!" he hastily declared. And he left the derisive white man to himself.

"The Indian spoke truth that time, señor," drawled Pablo. "It can not be done. Not even a lizard could creep up that mountain."

"Not unless there is a way up the north side," admitted the other. "We haven't seen that yet."

"There can be no chance on that side. Before now I have seen other mountains shaped like this one, and all sides were impassable."

THE NORTHERNER grudgingly nodded, and both contemplated the god mountain anew. It was one of those weird blocks peculiar to the ancient highland of Guayana, where untold centuries of erosion had worn stupendous mountains away to their granite cores. Almost perpendicular, it bulged a little outward, halfway up, as if deliberately carved to foil any mortal creature so insane as to attempt to climb it. Sudden swirls and writhings among the clouds beside it or above it proved that it was swept frequently by mighty winds, which could pick off a man and hurl him to death as easily as that man could snap an insect off his ear. At times when the clouds temporarily disappeared and the heat haze thinned, harsh rock, bare of visible vegetation, scowled ferociously down at every watcher. Even when the Northerner impiously trained strong binoculars on it, no possible route to its summit could be discerned. In coming thus far he had studied three sides of it. And its shape and size compelled him to concede that the northern portion probably was no better and, quite likely, worse; for on that side the gnawing northeast winds would naturally have had the maximum effect.

"Well, I'll measure it with the instruments at the first good chance," he decided, "and let it go at that."

The chance came on the third noon. Hungry and somewhat tired, the Yavaranos paused to eat and rest at a thinly forested inlet which gave shade from the sun, protection from the tugging current, and concealment from the vision of any Uayciaros who might chance to be cruising down the river. The shore was low and level. Pablo, who never neglected his food, ate heartily, but somewhat more rapidly than usual. Then he picked up the rifle which he always kept within reach and walked through the screen of trees and brush. In a few minutes he returned.

"If you wish to look at the mountain with that queer measuring thing of yours, señor, this is the best place," he announced, in guarded tones. "The hills between it and us are broken, and the air is clear. You may not have another chance so good."

"How far?" asked Hammond a few minutes later while adjusting his transit.

"Three miles," estimated the riverman, squinting shrewdly.

Hammond took his sights quickly but carefully.

"Nine thousand," he judged. "Nine and a little over. And we are standing at a height of—" he peered at the aneroid —"of a thousand and forty feet above sea level. Total, ten and— Well, call it three hundred. That's pretty close. Ten thousand three hundred—"

"Take care!" quietly warned Pablo. "The Indians come."

THE OBSERVER made a quick notation on a slip of paper. Then he turned to confront several scowling Yavaranos headed by Renato. They bore no weapons, but their expressions were ominous.

Behind the intruders, at the edge of the trees, stood the chief. Beside him was Chuku, whose moving lips indicated quiet talk to his ruler.

"What are you doing?" demanded Renato.

So arrogant were his tone and manner that the eyes of both the adventurers narrowed. For a minute there was a silence, while Hammond regarded him critically. It was manifest that the brown fellow had decided that this was his chance to exert a squeeze on the white men, that he was determined to force from them the presents he wanted or, in default thereof, to precipitate trouble.

Then sounded the voice of Pablo, low but hard edged.

"This one becomes insolent, señor. I have known it to happen before now with Indians of his type. A bullet in the bowels is the best lesson in politeness to such dogs. Here is your gun."

All the innate contempt of the Venezuelan for the Indian was in his tone. His previous discretion in dealing with these Yavaranos was lost in the recklessness of sudden anger.

Hammond, however, did not accept the proffered rifle. He did not even move a hand toward his pistol. Instead, he coldly countered:

"What I do is my business, not yours, Renato. Shut your mouth and go back to your boat!"

A pause, while an ugly look grew in the Indian's eyes. His followers keenly studied the white men, unable to understand their words, but reading their inimical expressions. In retaliation their own looks grew hostile.

"You are working magic!" Renato accused. "You are looking at the gods! They will destroy us because of your impudence!"

"You are a fool," retorted Hammond. "I have looked at other high gods along the Manapiare, and they did nothing. Neither will those of Umtucu."

Another pause, shorter than before. Chuku still talked to the chief, who watched without response. Abruptly Renato broke out—

"The gods will strike you—unless you give me three knives!"

Pablo gave a low grunt. Hammond eyed the crude blackmailer quizzically, then studied his backers. It was plain that those followers, afraid of the sacred mountain in spite of the prediction of the old wise men, would believe whatever Renato chose to tell them. But they had not increased in number. The chief still stood sardonically watching and listening to the soft voice of Chuku. Other Indians had grouped around their commander.

"You are wrong," he quietly replied. "I will give you no knives. And the gods strike you, not me!"

With that he struck.

SO SWIFTLY that no watching eye followed his hand, he shot a solid blow to Renato's jaw. The Indian toppled backward, fell sprawling, and lay without motion.

"*Cra!*" ejaculated Pablo.

"Ugh!" grunted the astounded Yavaranos.

"That will be about all," remarked Hammond. And he turned to gather up his instruments.

Pablo, a rifle in each hand, watched the Indians sharply. The indigenes stood petrified, staring at the recumbent body of their fellow and at the outlander who had laid him lifeless with such magical speed. To them, as to all other back bush Indians of their region, fist fighting was unknown. Foul holds, dirty blows and kicks, gouging and throttling and unspeakable clawing and rupturing all were known and used in hand to hand combat. But the clean, swift punch of the Anglo-Saxon, which could knock its recipient

senseless in a fraction of a second, was altogether outside their experience. Consequently the complete knockout seemed to them supernatural. They knew the stranger had drawn no weapon, they saw him now empty handed and outwardly unconcerned, and they regarded him with mingled anger and awe.

Now those who had backed the bribe seeker retrograded rapidly toward their weapons—only to find themselves brought to heel by their chief. That watchful individual had not been altogether satisfied recently with Renato, and did not care greatly whether he lived or died. He had absorbed the talk of Chuku, who had been telling him that no mountain spirits had resented the stranger's observations on the Manapiare. He saw no sign that the gods of Umtucu were enraged by the white man's temerity in looking at their home. And he still had use for that white man's fighting power. Wherefore he brought his errant subjects to a halt and awaited the next move.

Hammond closed his tripod, picked up the aneroid, and marched straight toward him. Pablo walked close behind, defiant and ready. Six feet from the chief, the Northerner paused, looking him steadily in the eye. The Yavarano commander returned the gaze without change of expression. When the bearded man resumed his dominant walk toward the canoes the silent warriors made way for him. Pablo, vigilant as ever, followed through.

"*Cra!*" repeated the riverman, when the canoe was reached. "That was fast work, señor! Now let us shove out at once and get more gun room before these people start revenge."

"Eh?" Hammond looked at him inquiringly. "Revenge for what? I didn't kill the fellow."

"You most certainly did, señor! I never have seen a man fall like that unless he was dead."

"No? They always fall that way when I hit them," chuckled Hammond. "But perhaps I had better go back and revive this grafter before the rest of the gang take the matter seriously. Put these things away."

He turned back, unarmed save for his belt gun, which the Yavaranos had not yet learned to recognize as a firearm. Pablo hesitated, looked at the instruments left in his care, then deserted them and silently followed. Back through the warriors the Northerner walked, empty handed, heedless of inimical looks. The Yavaranos were muttering now and, though they still awaited orders from their chief, it was evident that they believed Renato to be dead, and their anger was rising.

Straight to the inert body walked Hammond, intending to carry it to the river and douse it in the water as a restorative. As he grasped the motionless shape, however, its senses returned. Eyes opened, muscles tensed, hands and feet fumbled in an effort to raise the torso. Although Renato hardly realized as yet what had struck him down, his instinctive impulse was to get up. And, aided by the pull of his punisher, he was up in a couple of seconds; staring, staggering a little, but quite steady, albeit still dazed.

AN AMAZED murmur ran among the beholding Yavaranos. To their eyes, the white man had killed their fellow tribesman by some almost invisible motion, and then, after leaving him dead for several minutes, had restored his life by laying hands on him. Renato himself, foggily trying to collect his thoughts, eyed the Northerner in a confusion of anger, wonderment and fear. Before his brain had begun to work the explorer stamped on it a lasting impression.

"Renato," he said, "do not again pretend to be able to influence the gods of Umtucu or try to scare a white man. If you do you will be knocked dead again and stay dead."

The brown eyes rolled to Umtucu, doubly menacing to his shocked mind; came back and met the piercing gaze of the man who had made the gods strike

him down; then swerved aside, shrinking and fearful.

"*Comprende?*" pressed Hammond.

"*Sí,*" hoarsely acknowledged Renato.

"*Bueno. Vamos!*"

And so they went; Renato ahead, perturbation plain on his face; Hammond behind, bleakly regarding the others, who made way with greater alacrity than before. Mutters passed again among the Yavaranos, but now they were subdued and wondering. Chuku grinned wide. The chief, who never indulged in a grin, nevertheless smiled slightly. Then he resumed his stony look and walked to his canoe.

Two minutes later the inlet was deserted.

CHAPTER IX

CONQUEST

THAT night the chief made an unobtrusive but significant change in sleeping arrangements. Instead of holding himself aloof from the white men, as before, he had his hammock slung within six feet of that of Hammond. At an equal distance from the net of Pablo, who always slept alongside his employer, was hung the bed of Chuku. Thus the riflemen were flanked by the commander and the young Indian whom they knew best and trusted most.

No explanation of the chief's apparent whim was given or asked. Hammond, in fact, gave it little thought, though he acknowledged the change by a friendly nod and smile at the impassive leader. Pablo, on the other hand, looked around and then tightened his lips. Near by, sour faced and ugly eyed, stood Renato.

The chief knew Renato. And, by placing his hammock so near that of the white man, he tacitly warned Renato and all others to keep their distance. At least, that was the deduction of Pablo and, apparently, of the Spanish speaking Indian; for, after a long, unpleasant look, that Yavarano moved away, to be seen no more until morning.

As usual, the invaders slept serenely under their frail temporary shelters of braided *platanillo* leaves, and were up and off soon after dawn. During the morning traverse Hammond made a few written notes, studied Umtucu several times, and then gave all his attention to the river. Henceforth he was practically through with that ever present mountain. He had surreptitiously photographed it from several viewpoints, had placed its approximate position on his sketch map, measured it, and given up the foolhardy ambition to climb it. Now his mind reverted to the problem of how to search the savage country about its base for trace of the fallen thunder bird.

That project seemed almost as hopeless as his previous intention to mount to the home of the gods. Possibly the godless Uayciaros might know where the celestial creature had struck; but there was scant chance that they would tell a man who came against them as an enemy —unless one of them could be captured and forced to talk. At that thought his eyes lit up, only to cloud as he surveyed his grim mouthed escort. When the forthcoming battle broke no lives would be spared by those ruthless warriors.

He shrugged, and abandoned attempts to foresee the future. Looking along the vacant waterway, he remarked:

"It seems odd to me that we have come so far without seeing some sign of the Uayciaros. They must live far back."

"I have had the same thought," agreed Pablo. "And it seems more strange to me because I do not believe they are very far back. Renato told me, when we started, that we should journey only three or four days. We now are on the fourth day, and we have not seen so much as a floating chip or plantain skin to prove that people live on this river. It does not seem natural."

Hammond peered thoughtfully upstream.

"Renato's word is not worth much," he said. "He probably was only guessing at the distance. But do you mean that you think the Uayciaros know we are coming?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps they are letting us come on until we are in a trap. Or it may be that they are off somewhere else, making war at the west or the north. Or—*Quién sabe?* As I said, it does not seem natural that there is no sign—"

He caught his tongue. At the same instant Hammond sat up straighter. The canoe of the chief, a few yards ahead, had suddenly swerved from its steady course. Now a paddler in it snatched some small object from the surface and handed it to the lanky commander.

AFTER one long look at the find, the chief arose and peered ahead, searching the shores. At once the boatmen in all following canoes slowed their strokes. For a half minute their leader scanned the rocky stream and the jungled banks. Then he sat again. His dugout resumed progress, steering now somewhat to the left.

The others copied his course, moving ahead without the usual thump on the gunwales. A few minutes later they slid into the mouth of a heavily shadowed creek which sneaked in from the southwest.

A few rods in, the guiding canoe glided to the right shore. Two men stepped out, bearing bows and arrows, and vanished into the bush growth. All others in the war party waited in utter silence. Some time passed. Then the scouts reappeared, reentered their boat, whispered to the chief. Presently the latter stood again, facing the closely bunched canoes, and made several gestures of arm and hand which were altogether incomprehensible to the American and the Venezuelan. Thereafter he squatted, and his vessel moved on up the mysterious *caño*. As always, the others duplicated the movements of the commander's crew.

Hammond looked back. The faces of the Yavaranos in his own boat and those immediately behind were all alike now in expression: hard jawed, thin lipped, but fire eyed. Like jaguars, they scented their prey and anticipated blood, and at each forward movement their lust for killing grew on them. Immediately behind him, Pablo was cautiously sliding back the breechbolt of his rifle, reassuring himself that the magazine was full and ready for action. He glanced at his own gun, lying on the bottom of the canoe; drew his pistol halfway, let it drop back; then, paradoxically, cautioned in a whisper:

"We are visitors and observers. Do no shooting unless attacked."

"Humph!" muttered Pablo. "Let your observations be rapid, señor!"

Though his murmur was barely audible, the Indians scowled fiercely. Not another word was spoken by any one. The flotilla stole onward as soundlessly as drifting crocodiles.

ALONG the banks, not a leaf stirred. From ahead came no noises of birds, beasts, or men. The dark water before the pilot boat was unruffled. Nothing beyond, beside, near or far, indicated the presence of any life along the stream. Yet the scouts had undoubtedly found some trace beside it, for their boat moved with stealthy surety. Presently at a turn it stopped.

A long arm of the chief arose in signal. The rest of the armada crept up, bunched in a huddle, awaited another mute command. The chief stood up, looked over his men as calmly as if at home, and lifted a hand to give the final instructions for landing.

Then from the silent green bush at the right darted a narrow yellow streak. The chief's face suddenly convulsed. For a second he stood swaying. Then he crumpled over sidewise, hit the water with a loud splash, and vanished. In that brief instant of his passing every eye saw that he was pierced through by a long cane arrow.

"Damn!" rasped Hammond, snatching up his rifle.

Red rage surged across his face, and his eyes blazed. He had liked that chief.

Now from both sides of the creek burst a volley of savage yells and a sleet of ar-

rows. Yavaranos in various boats, leaping up with their own weapons in hand, slumped forward or toppled overboard, suddenly limp. Among these was Renato, skewered through the neck.

Eyes wide, mouth open, blood spurting from his throat, the Indian who had tried to capitalize his gods sprawled sluggishly into the water and was gone forever. With him, in various grotesque postures of sudden death, disappeared a half score of his fellows. An instant later these slain warriors were followed by all those left living.

A voice screamed a command. At once every Yavarano able to move dived over the gunwales. Amid the prolonged splash of their combined leap, out broke a rapid crash of gunfire. Deserted, the pair of white men made no move to seek refuge in the creek. Instead they hammered the flanking bush with bullets, Hammond shooting along the right shore, Pablo firing into the tangle at the left.

Hammond's first shot was aimed at the spot whence had flown the arrow that killed the chief. A sudden commotion in the masking verdure proved that the bullet had not been wasted. As he continued to shoot, jerking his muzzle at random toward other likely lurking places, other abrupt disturbances shook the greenery. Whether or not the flying missiles were finding human prey, they were striking terror into the ambushed killers. On Pablo's side, too, the shock of finding themselves faced by gunfire scared the hidden Uayciaros into plunges toward thicker cover. Loosed haphazard, a few arrows flitted toward the riflemen, but all missed. For the moment, the terrifying guns had demoralized the attack.

Now, as suddenly as they had vanished, the Yavaranos reappeared from the depths. Sleek black heads and wet brown shoulders arose at the edges of both shores. With a simultaneous scrambling, stumbling rush the raiders hurled themselves up into the leafy covert of their enemies, gripping the weapons which they had carried under water with them. Shouts, snarls, screams, thuds of blows, cracklings of brush, thumps of falling men bore witness to ferocious combat concealed behind the dense curtain.

On the creek, Hammond and Pablo knelt forgotten in their dugout. No more arrows flew at them. No Uayciaro bowman now had time or thought for anything but the leaping, stabbing, ax swinging, throttling Yavaranos. The white men promptly took advantage of the respite to reload their rifles. Then they glanced around. In company with the dead men in other canoes, they were floating slowly downstream.

"Well, señor," dryly asked Pablo, "do we go ashore for more observations?"

Hammond, buckling on a broad cartridge belt, nodded.

"At once," he instructed. "Over there."

His head tilted toward a snag at the edge of the right shore. Pablo picked up a paddle, stroked expertly, drove the heavy craft to the designated point, and wedged it among the pallid branches of the dead tree, with one end touching the bank. Then, slinging from a shoulder the capacious leather bullet bag which he always preferred to a belt, he debarked. Hammond came at his heels.

A FEW feet up, they found a path; a narrow but well beaten track leading inland; the same one previously discovered by the scouts. Whether the wily Uayciaros, already in expectant ambush, had let those scouts pass and return unharmed, or whether the scouts themselves had been detected by some lurking habitant who then warned the others, was a question not likely to be answered. At any rate, it was now a very busy byway. Along it, and in the adjacent bush, jungle war was raging with full fury.

Hardly had the two set foot on it when they saw their first Uayciaro. A few feet ahead, two interlocked forms grappling on the ground partly disengaged, the uppermost freeing itself from the clutching arms of its opponent and instantly clamping both hands on the throat of the

one below. The victim squirmed, kicked, heaved convulsively but uselessly. He was one of the youngest Yavaranos. The victor was a heavily muscled, flat faced creature, with long unkempt hair and protruding teeth, who outweighed his intrepid assailant by many pounds. Now, as he choked that invader to death, he blew spittle into the dying youngster's face.

Hammond sprang forward, swung his rifle. Knocked senseless, the Uayciaro slumped over and lay still. The Northerner, looking into his bestial face, understood why the Yavaranos called these people animals. This one, at least, was merely a brute in the shape of a man. And, like all animals, he wore no clothing —not even the small breechclout common among the Yavaranos. Totally naked, he seemed a vicious species of ape.

After one inclusive look the explorer glanced at the rescued Yavarano and walked on. Pablo paused a second, inserted the muzzle of his gun in the Uayciaro's uppermost ear, and pulled trigger. Then, ejecting the spent shell, he plodded coolly onward.

The Northerner wheeled at the blunt report, met the Venezuelan's artless gaze, looked at the Uayciaro, then shrugged and fared forward again, intent on the next development. Within a few steps he met two more struggling antagonists, wrestling furiously on the earth. This time the Yavarano fighter had the better of the combat, however, and was forcing his enemy under. The white man paused long enough to thump his gun butt solidly on the greasy Uayciaro head. Thereupon the Yavarano promptly reached to a fallen brazilwood spear and thrust it through his foe's heart.

Yard by yard the pair advanced, deviating whenever they found a fight going on, aiding the Yavarano warriors by blows or bullets, then continuing their course. Once two Uayciaros stepped from the cover of a big tree trunk to attack the white men with long *tigre* lances, which they hurled like javelins. Dodging, they retaliated with bullets. Pablo killed his man, while Hammond shot the other down, but missed a vital spot. Thereupon the Venezuelan coolly walked to the wounded man, stabbed him in the jugular, wiped his poniard on a leaf, and rejoined his boss.

Soon the battle seemed to wane. The vocal noises diminished, the rushings and rustlings and cracklings grew fewer. A Uayciaro dashed suddenly from the forest, bounded across the path in front of the white pair without seeing them, and dived into the creek. Close behind ran three Yavaranos, intent as bloodhounds, who sprang into the water to finish him. From the farther side came encouraging yells from other men of the Manapiare.

"That tells the tale," declared Pablo, letting his gun sink. "We have won."

A SERIES of rapid plunges from the other shore corroborated his statement. When the riflemen looked across they found the swimmers to be all Yavaranos. Man after man landed, grinning triumphantly, looking for more enemies, even though their own number had appreciably shrunk and more than one of the survivors was wounded. Among them came Chuku, bleeding copiously from a deep gash down one cheek and another across his chest, but proud and happy. Whatever stigma might have clung to him because of his previous slavery would be obliterated forever by those scars won in battle.

Shouts and answers rang. More men appeared from the near woods. When all had arrived—a few of them crawling, unable to stand—it was evident that victory had been costly. More than half of the party were gone. The chief was dead. The canoes, too, were drifting away. And the settlement of the Uayciaros, with its loot of women and other possessions of the conquered fighters, had not yet been found.

However, the invaders were not yet through. One of the sub-chiefs still lived, and now he took command. In response to terse orders, several men hurried back along the path to retrieve the

drifting dugouts and take the wounded aboard. All others able to walk advanced in file to find the other end of the foot track.

They had not far to go. A hundred yards farther on, the waterside route ended at a clearing littered with barkless trunks of down trees. In its midst stood a tribe house similar to that of the Yavaranos, though more crude in construction. Keen scrutiny of it revealed only one human figure outside; and that one, instead of standing alert, was sitting on a stump and drooping forward as if dozing.

Warily the new commander of the shrunken war party studied that house, several huts beside it, the big logs cumbering the ground, and the edge of the surrounding jungle. Just out of one trap, he had no desire to put his foot into another. The house was large enough to shelter a considerably larger number of Uayciaros than those who had just fought his force. Yet it was most unlikely that warriors would hide there when there was fighting to do on their own creek. But still he watched the place, making no nearer approach, until Hammond tired of the halt.

"*Vamos*," he bade Pablo. And he walked toward the house.

The Venezuelan followed him, with an unspoken but unmistakable sneer at the hesitant Yavaranos.

"Huh!" grunted a vexed warrior. With that he boldly strode after the whites. So did all others. The chief looked angry, but said never a word.

The shape slouching on the stump watched them come, but made no effort to rise. Even when the leaders stopped beside it, it only stared at them lackadaisically. It was a man, scrawny, dull eyed, apparently either idiotic or utterly careless as to his fate. Breathing shallowly, eying the merciless victors without visible interest, he remained limp.

"*Enfermo*," laconically judged Pablo. "Sick."

One or two of the Yavaranos perhaps understood that word. At any rate, mutters passed among them, and all began to look uneasy. In common with most of their race, they had an innate, unconquerable fear of contagious disease. Several of them drew back from the sinister shape which watched them in such a snaky way.

Slowly, very slowly, the filmed eyes took on a malicious glint, as if the brain behind them contemplated some diabolical jest. Then, suddenly, horribly, the creature laughed.

"Ha!" it voiced a single dry croak. Then it swayed, fell off its seat and, grinning, died.

"*Cra!*" exclaimed Pablo, scowling at the house. "There is something wrong here. A pestilence, perhaps."

HAMMOND frowned at the structure, so strangely quiet. The Yavaranos eyed it with increasing nervousness. Again it was the Northerner who set the example for them. He walked to the nearest small door, peered into its dark interior, discerned nothing, stooped, and entered. Doggedly the Venezuelan and the Yavaranos trailed him. Inside all halted, the Indians sending around them looks of rapidly mounting apprehension. As details became clear they shrank back.

Pablo had guessed right. On crude beds of sticks and leaves lay at least a score of naked Uayciaros, mortally ill, dying, or newly dead. Men, women, children were there, some motionless, some weakly moving, some murmuring low moans of despair. The air was fetid with odors of disease, filth and corruption. The settlement was in the grip of an epidemic which evidently had already slain half its people, and which probably had infected even the warriors who so recently had grappled with the invaders beside the creek. As the penalty of their close contacts with those fighters, the surviving Yavaranos themselves might now be contaminated.

Suddenly a woman voiced a long, shuddering wail. The ghastly noise was too much for the scared Yavaranos. With hoarse ejaculations they bolted to the

door; jammed there in clawing, wrenching frenzy to escape; stumbled out, fell over one another, regained footing, and sprinted madly for the creek.

Only one lingered, and his hesitation was but momentary. That one was Chuku who, outside, hung midway between continued flight and return to the white men who had treated him so well. Then his eyes fell on the grinning corpse beside the stump. With a choking noise he dashed after his own comrades.

At the water the Yavaranos leaped in and frantically washed themselves. Then, pellmell, they swam to their approaching canoes, scrambled aboard, seized paddles, and threw all their strength into disordered strokes toward the river.

The waves thrown up by their thrashing of the water subsided to ripples. The ripples died out. Slowly the creek bore toward the river the wooden weapons dropped in the rout of the conquerors. It pushed them out of its mouth and was itself again, smooth, silent, unchanged by the coming and going of the raiders.

Those raiders were gone for all time. The white men who had goaded them into coming were left to live or die as they might in a place reeking with pestilence.

CHAPTER X

CAPTIVES

ON THE bank of the forsaken creek Hammond and Pablo looked at each other and shrugged. Slower in retreat than their panic stricken allies, they had arrived only to find the water empty.

"Good riddance, perhaps," philosophically remarked Hammond. "Our friends might not feel so friendly toward us after this."

"No, truly. They would be most likely to kill us, if they could, for leading them into this disaster. But— *Por Dios*, I wonder if they took our canoe!"

"Go and see!"

Pablo hurried off, running for the first time since the American had known him. The latter stood rubbing his bristly jaw and scowling in anxiety. The loss of the boat alone would be of little importance, for there must be Uayciaro canoes near by, to be had for the taking. But the disappearance of all the equipment in that craft, and, most important, of all the written and photographic records of the region—that would be catastrophe.

Long minutes passed. Then from downstream sounded irregular dull bumps on wood and swashes of water, as of a single paddle laboriously propelling a dugout. Soon appeared the canoe, with Pablo squatting forward and toiling with a broad blade.

"Here it is, señor," he announced. "They were too much scared to stop and—"

Crash!

A thunderous detonation killed the Venezuelan's next words. At the same instant the blazing sunlight was extinguished. Dull light remained, but so sudden was the change that the land seemed swept by darkness. Both men shot a startled look skyward. Hammond, standing in the clearing, saw more than the riverman, still under the trees.

"Well! The gods of Umtucu have come to life!" he exclaimed. "Come on, Pablo, get ashore!"

From the top of the towering god mountain had mushroomed a black cloud which was spreading with incredible speed. From that menacing formation now burst a flash which illuminated the clearing with a weird, ghastly glare. It vanished. Then came another concussion.

Pablo redoubled his strokes. The long canoe floated to shore. Hammond seized its blunt bow, tugged mightily, forced the round bottom up on the slanting earth. Pablo rapidly unfolded a short tarpaulin and cast it over the baggage. Then he nimbly ran forward and sprang out.

"We must find shelter," he prompted. "This will be bad. Let us use one of those huts yonder."

"All right."

They walked fast toward the tribe house. The distance was short, but sev-

eral blinding flashes and deafening reports broke before they reached the first roof. It was a mere shed, open sided, thatch topped, in which was a clay fireplace; the community bakery, where the Uayciaro women had customarily cooked the staple diet of South American Indians, cassava. Within the thick walls of the main house could have been found much better shelter from the imminent assault of elemental powers. But neither of the voyagers cared to reenter it just now. Instead, they sat down side by side on the earth, leaned against the dead fireplace, breathed clean air, and waited.

COMPLETE blackness now overspread the immediate sky. Cannon shots of thunder, searing flashes of lightning deafened and blinded every creature within many a mile. The gods of Umtucu, so long quiescent, now were aroused and hurling their bolts—whither? At the retreating Yavaranos, the expiring Uayciaros, or the outlanders in the hut, who, still undaunted, looked up at them?

To the Yavaranos, fleeing at top speed toward their own country, the awful outbreak was a manifestation of the wrath of the gods whom they most feared; the culmination of a debacle into which they had allowed themselves to be led by the accursed white men. Even if they were not wrecked and drowned among the rapids in their headlong flight, even if they escaped contagion from the Uayciaro animals, they would never forget this bold expedition and its consequences nor cease to execrate its instigators. For many a year to come, the Rio Manapiare would be a bad place for explorers.

To the dying Uayciaros, the animals who never had known enough to fear the gods on high, the aerial explosions were merely loud noises in the sky, to which they had long been accustomed and to which, in their extremity, they now gave no attention. To the North American and the South American the uproar was a fierce thunderstorm which soon must pass. Both watched it, defensively narrowing their eyes against its dazzling light, but unafraid. As they gazed, Hammond's thoughts harked back to the house of Thorpe, far away now. Down there he had dreamed of a tall mountain and a black thunder cloud sweeping from it—and of what else? Nothing that he could remember. After the rush of that black shape all had been hidden in darkness. Now that he had reached a place where dreams came true, was something hidden from him here?

Crash! Another terrific explosion resounded. Then came violent wind, bearing oblique rain which hit like bullets. Within the space of three breaths those individual drops became a sheet of water which struck with drowning force. Pablo ducked, crept to the lee side of the fireless furnace, and lay down along its base. Hammond pulled his helmet lower, shielded his nostrils with a forearm, but still watched.

Now fire filled the sky and water deluged the earth. The tribe house, a few yards away, was almost obliterated from view. So dense was the flood descending from the realm of the gods that even the brilliance of their unearthly fires failed to give more than a blurred impression of the solid walls so near at hand. Senses were dulled still more by the benumbing shocks of such thunder as the Northerner had never known. But still he sat facing the attack, and as he endured it he smiled grimly. He was visioning the Yavaranos, caught on the open river and assailed by the full force of the tempest.

"Serves them right, the quitters!" he muttered.

At length the bombardment ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The barrage of water stopped. The rapid fires faded. The smashing explosions ended. Sunshine sprang forth upon a drenched clearing. Umtucu, temporarily blotted out, reappeared—close, harsh, yet graced with a new attraction; for down its sides fell new born cataracts, virginal white, spreading into filmy veils of gray near the base. To any man whose eyes were not blinded

by superstitious fear, the god mountain now was truly godlike. The softness of those falling waters gave a sublime beauty to the great block which hitherto had been a hard brute bulk.

The wet men walked out into the sun, there to stand a minute gazing up at the far, high waterfalls. Then to their nostrils came anew the smell of the tribe house; and their eyes fell to the mud spattered corpse of the savage who had dropped dead from the stump. Their faces contorted in repugnance.

"Unless you wish to make further observations here, I think we had better go somewhere else *muy pronto,*" declared Pablo.

"Quite right. But—" Hammond paused, looking at the plague-stricken house. "But I am going to make one more observation first. You may wait out here."

He stepped toward the door.

"*Ajo!* Do not enter that pest hole again, señor!" remonstrated Pablo.

"I'm going to look around," was the stubborn reply.

TIGHT lipped, the explorer reentered the abode of sickness. There, breathing as lightly as he could, he walked around among the victims, giving each a short but sharp scrutiny. Just what he sought he did not know, but he felt inexplicably impelled to look about him once more before departing.

Some of the supine savages returned his look with eyes full of fear, apparently mistaking him for some sort of demon who had come to torture them in their helplessness; for none of them had ever seen a man so big, or wearing such a strange addition to his skull as the English sun helmet. Others regarded him with the indifference of approaching dissolution, or gave him no attention at all. None made an effort to rise, nor even scowled in enmity. All were too near death to think of attempting defense, still less to consider attack. So he looked at all of them unhindered, finding nothing to justify his examination. Then he strode doorward faster than he had entered.

Pablo, who had reluctantly followed him as far as the entrance, gave way with alacrity. Outside, Hammond drew long breaths of damp air and moved toward the creek. Then he turned back, nearly colliding with the Venezuelan.

"May as well see everything before I go," he decided. "I'll walk around the house. You needn't come."

But Pablo, though muttering with impatience, came. Over the muddy ground, strewn with bits of offal, they trod, looking at the crude huts, in which lay wooden tools, a stone ax or two, log troughs, and other implements of work. Then, halfway around the big house, both paused.

There was another house, much smaller, but constructed like the main domicile; no flimsy shed, but solid walled and thick thatched, with one tiny door in its circular exterior. That door was a single slab of heavy wood, hingeless, set on end, and held tight by a thick bar. The bar lay in notches cut in the ends of two short logs, planted upright on either side of the entrance and solidly braced, as if to resist any shove against the barrier from within.

"What do you suppose that is?" queried Hammond.

Pablo, frowning in puzzlement, answered slowly:

"It looks like a pen for some large beast —or a prison for men. That door can be opened only from outside. Or— *Cra!* I wonder if these people are snake worshipers!"

"Meaning what?"

"I mean that perhaps that house holds a huge serpent, to which these savages feed captives. I have heard of such things."

The American's face tightened. The Venezuelan continued to frown at the mysterious structure. Then the Northerner stepped to the door and thumped it with his rifle butt.

"*Hola!*" he called. "Is anything human in there?"

There came a muffled yell:

"*Amigos! Amigos!*"

"*Cra!*" ejaculated Pablo. "It's a man!"

"Watch, and be ready," cautioned Hammond.

He essayed to lift the bar with one hand. So tight was its fit, though, that he had to lean his gun against the wall and use both. Meanwhile the shouts inside were redoubled. Not only one voice, but several, now volleyed a Babel of noise.

The bar, heaved upward with Hammond's full power, suddenly sprang loose from the grip of the wet notches. The unattached door swung outward at the top. Hammond flung it aside, peered in, then recoiled. Out through the opening gushed fetid, superheated air which choked him.

Pablo, with rifle half raised, stood alertly watching. Hammond stepped aside, coughed and commanded:

"Come out!"

A wild chorus screeched reply. Above all sounded a voice joyously shouting:

"*Blancos!* White men! Oh, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh-ho-ho-ha-ha-ha!"

The hysterical laughter rang again and again, dominating the unintelligible vociferations of the other unseen men in the dark.

"Come out!" roared Hammond.

"We can not!" came quick reply. "We are tied! Cut us loose!"

HAMMOND acted at once. Stooping low, he put in his head and surveyed the interior. Crouched against the walls, straining at unseen bonds, were nine men; gaunt, brown creatures which struggled and yammered at him for release.

At first glance all seemed Indians. But one of them had a long black beard.

Drawing his belt knife, the discoverer crawled in and began liberating the prisoners. Each was tied with a stout *piassava* rope to a strong post, his hands helpless behind his back. As the sharp steel severed the rough fibers each man plunged forward and scrambled for the door.

"*Alto!*" barked Pablo, as the first emerged. "Stand up and stand still!"

The captive obeyed. So did the others in their turns. Hammond made the circuit of the place, cutting ropes with all speed. When all the bound men were freed he lunged forth, straightened, and looked again at them.

Eight of them were Indians—but not Uayciaros. Emaciated, long haired, unkempt, offensive to smell and sight, they yet had a cleaner appearance than the savages who had fought at the waterside and those within the house walls. Their faces were more intelligent, their starved bodies better framed, than those of their recent masters. The ninth man, now perceptibly lighter than his companions, returned the gaze of the newcomers unswervingly, though his eyes were puckered against the dazzling sun. His momentary hysteria had passed, and he had regained full control of himself. Notwithstanding nakedness and dirt, he stood with head high and no outward acknowledgment of inferiority to his clothed captors.

"What are you?" bluntly demanded Hammond.

"Slaves," defiantly answered the bearded man, in poorly pronounced Spanish. "And what are you?"

"Wanderers. And exactly who are you, Señor Slave?"

The reply came tardily. The brown eyes of the spokesman, now fully adjusted to the sun glare, studied the unshaven face and English helmet of his liberator. Then he spoke English.

"My name's Greenleaf. What's yours?"

CHAPTER XI

OUT

HAMMOND stood wordless, looking at the lost aviator whom he had never expected to find alive, and whose appearance now testified that for many months he had endured a living death.

The Greenleaf who flew from North America was, according to photographs, full cheeked, merry eyed, pleasant mouthed, thick fleshed. The man who now gave his name was but a skeleton

covered with ropelike muscles and sinews. His face was cadaverous, his eyes cavernous and cold, his expression bitter. His skin, once smooth and clear, was burned by hell hot suns into a coarse brown hide. Moreover, it was pitted deep by torturous bites of poisonous insects and scarred by many a cruel gash and blow.

His bony companions in misery were in little better condition than he. Indeed, now that their first mad joy at their rescue was beginning to abate, they commenced to droop as if lacking strength to stand erect. The American, however, held himself straight by force of will, meanwhile peering intently at his fellow countryman.

"My name is Hammond," at length responded the newcomer. "I came up here to try and find your bones."

The bearded mouth quirked in a mirthless smile.

"You've found them," the flyer retorted. "I didn't suppose they were worth looking for. But welcome to our city!"

He glanced to right and left, seeking savages. Hammond and Pablo followed his eyes, and both scowled. No Uayciaros were in sight; but from the tribe house came an odor, borne by veering breeze, which recalled the menace of infection.

"Have you men caught this disease?" he asked.

"Not yet," denied the skeleton. "We're too hard to get sick."

"Who are these chaps with you?"

"Captives, out of luck, like me. Good fellows."

"All right. Let's go. We'll talk later."

He picked up his rifle and strode away, rapidly rounding the noxious pest house and heading for the creek. Greenleaf grunted to his fellows in misfortune and followed. The rest fell in behind, Pablo, last, watching the strangers who walked at the back of his señor. Although all were weaponless and manifestly weak, he was taking no chances in this hostile place.

As the short column wound down the hillside the slaves kept looking about them in wonderment. Evidently their close pen had excluded the noises of the waterside fight. They knew nothing of the Yavaranos who had come and gone. Consequently the complete disappearance of their brutal masters was inexplicable, unless it could be attributed to superhuman prowess of the two intruders; and not even credulous Indians could accept that explanation. But none asked questions. Crowding on the heels of their tall savior, they reached the waiting canoe.

"Get in," briefly ordered Hammond. "And get out!"

So they went. The Indians picked up paddles and stroked away. The American who had been their fellow slave, but who still was a white man, sat on the little trunk, no longer a laborer. The masters of the primitive craft squatted at bow and stern, guns ready, eyes alert for any Uayciaros who might have evaded death and now be lurking with arrows on strings. They found none. Rapidly they cruised downstream, leaving forever the clearing which soon would contain nothing but death. Then they shot out into the river, out into pure air and brilliant sun and clean water and the stern, strong gaze of the high gods of Umtucu.

"That," suddenly said Greenleaf, gazing up at the mountain, "is what has kept me alive!"

Nobody answered. But Hammond, turning his eyes to the austere heights, understood. Unconquered, unconquerable, Umtucu was a challenge to the souls of men. No man who lacked the spiritual strength to comprehend and accept that dare could endure. Greenleaf had endured.

OUT IN the current of the Paré, Pablo laid down his gun and picked up the big steering paddle.

"Up," directed Hammond.

The Venezuelan, though frowning in puzzlement, swung the bow upstream. The Indians, unquestioning, continued paddling. Hammond watched the shore until he saw a small cove at the right,

then signaled Pablo to steer into it. The canoe grounded and lay snug against a shelving bank.

"Now," said Hammond, rising, "I suggest that we all take a fluent and copious bath. The water's clean here. Then we'll have some grub and have a smoke and get acquainted. Does the general idea suit you, Greenleaf?"

For answer, the ex-slave leaped overside. The Indians followed as one man. Splashing, ducking under, swimming about, returning to stand and scrub anew with work calloused palms, they washed off every trace of the pollution of slavery. Emerging, they stood straighter and stepped with renewed vigor, immeasurably refreshed, physically and mentally, by their cool cleanliness. Thereupon Hammond and Pablo, who had stripped but maintained watchfulness of shores and river, took their turns, not only bathing themselves but washing their clothes.

Then came food for all and tobacco for the white men. The Indians wolfed the travel fodder abandoned by the Yavaranos, while the aviator devoured a large share of Hammond's carefully hoarded emergency rations. The avidity of the nine testified to hunger bordering on starvation.

"No breakfast today?" probed Hammond.

"No, nor yesterday," Greenleaf returned, eagerly accepting a cigaret.

"What? You mean that you didn't eat at all yesterday?"

"Not a bite for two days. We've been shut in that stifling pen forty-eight hours, tied tight. No food—no water—heat—suffocation—"

He broke off, grimaced, drew a long inhalation of smoke. Hammond scowled in sympathy.

"They were expecting us," he surmised. "Some hunter probably spotted us coming up and brought back the bad news. So they caged you old birds while they waited for new ones."

"Set a trap?"

"They sure did. And it worked. But it bit them worse than us. They're all through."

"Uh-huh. But how? Shoot me your whole yarn. Then I'll reciprocate. Now I'm starved for the sound of English."

His sentences came short, jerky, interspersed by puffs at the cigaret. His eyes kept roving as if he were still on guard against the dead Uayciaros, or against others, alive, creeping up to attack. Nerves worn raw by protracted misery were as yet unadjusted to freedom and comparative safety.

Hammond eyed him a moment, then opened his trunk and drew out a spare shirt and trousers.

"Put these on," he casually directed. "They'll be rather big for you, but you'll feel more comfortable, I think. And have another cigaret."

The practical psychology proved efficacious. The calm tone of his rescuer, the feel of Northern garments on his hitherto naked body, the continuance of indulgence in nicotine, all brought a perceptible relaxation of strain. Then, while Pablo lounged with his rifle, keeping lazy but efficient watch for any suspicious movement or sound from any quarter, Hammond told his whole tale. When it was done the long lost man was sitting thoroughly at ease.

"All of which," he said, with a smile, "proves that the fools will never be dead. I was a fool, I guess; the man who tries a tough stunt and fails is always a fool for trying, isn't he? Maybe so, maybe not. But you're a bigger fool to come after me—and a fool for luck, I'll say. You've taken chances as big as mine, only different. And any fellow that faces battle, murder, and sudden death just to run down a funny yarn about a thunder bird is sure an idiot. At least, that's what all the safety first wise boys up home would say. But that same idiot rates nine kowtows and a grand salaam from me.

"Well, my tale of woe will be short. There's a lot of it that I'd rather not remember too well."

His lids narrowed as he glanced across the Paré, beyond whose farther shore lay

the festering spot of his servitude. Hammond, silent, waited. Soon the other went on:

"YOU KNOW what I was trying to do—fly from Florida to Pará, at the mouth of the Amazon. I hopped the Caribbean all right, except that the east wind drifted me off course, westward. Or maybe my compass went queer. Anyway, I found the Orinoco, and half decided to follow it, but didn't.

"It practically runs around three sides of a square, according to the maps, and I didn't want to burn three times as much gas as a straight line would use up. Right there is where I committed a bad social error. If I'd taken my flop beside the big river I'd have stood a chance of finding help. But I didn't know I was going to flop. So I kept coming, hitting as straight toward the Amazon as I could.

"Mountains rose up, and then came this big boy, Umtucu. A thunderstorm was making up on the north side. The air was bumpy, but I flew low over the mountain to have a look at the top. It's queer; bare stone, eroded into spikes and squatty humps that look like giants walking or sitting—"

"The gods of Umtucu!" exclaimed Hammond.

"Maybe. They're weird, anyway. Possibly some bold Indian got up there centuries ago, when the mountain was differently shaped, and brought the story down. And there's been more than one time since I breezed over that place when I felt that those shapes really were gods, and that they knocked me down because I intruded on them. That's a crazy idea, probably—but a fellow gets that way after he's been here awhile."

"I understand. Go on."

"All right. I cleared the place and looked ahead. Then it happened. The ship caught fire.

"How it happened I don't know. If it was lightning I never felt it. She was flying sweet, and then— *Whoosh!* There wasn't a chance. So I jumped.

"The 'chute let me down in open ground. There's a lot of it over here. The rivers are all timbered, but in between them the land is practically bare. The ship went to hell in a hurry. I walked over to her, but couldn't save a thing. So there was little me, with nothing left and no place to go.

"Well, I'd seen this river before I flopped, so I started walking to it. Thought I might find some Indians who would help me out. I found some, all right! But they didn't help me out. Not much!"

His teeth clenched. His eyes began to smolder. His hands went to the cigaret packet and match box lying on a paddler's seat, and swiftly he lighted a third roll of tobacco.

"White men aren't popular on the Paré," he went on, hard voiced. "Neither are brown men—of other tribes. These people are very exclusive. So exclusive that they not only exclude outsiders but go out to take a crack at them. But they've got more brains than you'd think. They know it's worse to be a captive than to be dead. So they take a prisoner now and then. And they know mental torture that lasts for months is worse than two or three days of the crude physical stuff our own Sioux and Apaches used to enjoy. Particularly for a white man. To look at them, you'd never suspect them of that much intelligence. You'd say they were hardly higher than monkeys. In one way, that would be right. They have all the filthy, vicious instincts of monkeys, all the malice, all the bestiality and brutality. But they also have the brains of devils. So they made me the slave of devils and gave me my hell.

"They wanted me to die slowly, broken by sun and labor and humiliation and filth and unending cruelty. The longer I lasted, the longer they could enjoy my breakdown. But I was tougher than they thought I was. I've outlived every Indian slave I found here. These fellows here have all been caught since I came. Three are quite new. But they were all beginning to sag. I'm the only one that's refused to cave in."

HE PUFFED again, burning up half his cigaret in a few furious draws.

"I tried to escape, of course. I fought them, without weapons, time and again. I nearly killed two or three of them before others could knock me out. But I paid for that. Yes, I paid."

One hand passed down his scarred torso, on which the score of those payments was indelibly recorded.

"But they always avoided killing me. They wanted to wreck my mind, turn me into a driveling idiot, before they bumped me off. The fiends! The—"

He burst into frenetic cursing. His smoldering eyes blazed with murderous flame. His beard bristled. His bony hands clawed at the ground like talons, and his whole body quivered with fury. Then, as suddenly, he bit back further words and sat panting, gritting his teeth, but voiceless.

"Go ahead," encouraged Hammond. "Get it all out of your system."

"It's out," gulped Greenleaf. "Now what?"

"Well, let's see." The rescuer looked around at the brown men, out at the river, back at his trunk, in which lay the records of dead Thorpe. For a moment he considered.

"We've got to get out, and the sooner the better," he then declared. "Know anything about the rest of this river?"

"Only that there are a lot more Uayciaros on it. They're sick, though. This epidemic is all along the Paré."

"Oh. Then that's why they haven't been raiding lately."

"No doubt. But there are probably enough to do us in if they spot us. And they'll spot us. They're like snakes. You don't see them until they've struck."

Hammond nodded, scowling, remembering the ambush on the creek, which not even the Yavarano chief or scouts had perceived.

"Well, then, we'll go as we came," he decided. "We can sneak past the Yavarano settlement late at night, when they're all asleep, and they'll never know we've passed. These brown boys will have to paddle us. Are any of them Yavaranos?"

"No."

"Good. Then they won't desert. We'll pay them well when we reach my motorboat, then turn them loose. We'll get out in said motorboat. There's almost no gasoline, but with the current behind us we can get down to some place where there is some. After that we're homeward bound, hot foot."

"Right! Let's go!"

Greenleaf arose eagerly. The squatting Indians followed his cue. He turned to them and monotoned a series of sounds unintelligible to either Hammond or Pablo, but evidently comprehensible to the aborigines. They stood dumb a moment, digesting his statements, looked at Hammond, then grunted acquiescence and chose places for steady paddling.

Pablo, moving deliberately, stepped from shore to the seat on the overhanging stern and settled himself again in the position of steersman. The two Northerners sat down side by side amidships, Hammond alert, Greenleaf lax. Paddles dipped. The boat swam in the current.

There, heading downstream, it surged away with redoubled power. Fast and faster it sped out of the land of the godless Uayciaros, paddle-shafts thumping in unison against the gunwale, pilot expertly conning the water ahead, commander watching the shores. Soon the mouth of the creek of death swung past and was gone. Beyond lay only empty water, rocky, dangerous, yet free of stealthy ambush; for its rapids brawled a warning, and its silent depths harbored no treachery.

Soon the watcher of the waysides relaxed his vigilance and sat with gun loose. He and the man he had rescued looked aside at towering Umtucu, which once more had become stark and utterly hard; for from its sides the transient witchery of the waterfalls now had vanished.

But the cloud dwelling gods who had hurled their wrath at the Yavaranos held their peace. For the gods of men respect men who dare to face them—and no others.

W. C. TUTTLE

tells a moving little story of a wanderer who came home

THE PROOF

AT FIRST glance you would have said the man was sixty. A closer inspection, and you would have said seventy, perhaps. As a matter of fact, he was forty. Tall, lean jawed, with a deeply lined face, hair as gray as a December rabbit, a decided sag to his lean shoulders.

He wore a faded old mackinaw coat over a faded shirt, Oregon pants, old sheepskin chaps, worn high heel boots, and atop his gray head was a floppy old Stetson, smoke and weather stained to a greenish hue.

A tough looking customer was Wanderin' Jones, known up and down the cattle country as a salty old sinner who never smiled. Wanderin' never stayed long in one place. He was a good cow hand, honest as the proverbial dollar, silent as a clam. The bunkhouse and camp-fire had never heard his story, because he never told it.

Just now he was sitting in a saloon, humped near the stove. There were only two other men in the place; the bartender and a young cowboy, flushed of face, drinking raw liquor, talking excitedly, vehemently. Wanderin' could not hear what was said, but he knew the cowboy was working up a rage against somebody. He had seen the same thing

done plenty of times. Sometimes it had meant a killing.

The young cowboy went out on unsteady legs; the bartender smiled grimly after him, as he polished up the bar. From far away came the soft notes of a church bell. Wanderin' lifted his head, listening intently. Even through the closed door came the musical *clang-clang —clang-clang* of the bell.

The bartender came over and stoked the stove, but Wanderin' did not look at him.

"Christmas Eve," muttered the bartender. "Ought to be some of the boys driftin' in pretty soon. Must be zero outside."

Wanderin' lifted his eyes and looked at the bartender.

"Christmas Eve?" he muttered. "That's right."

His lips compressed tightly for a moment, and the hinges of his lean jaws bulged, as he nodded thoughtfully.

"Christmas Eve."

"Shore is," said the bartender. "Didja ever believe in Santa Claus?"

"I guess not."

The bartender shrugged his shoulders, turning his back to the stove.

"Peace on earth, good will to men," he said slowly.

"Somethin' like that," said Wanderin' softly.

"That's what they say it means, but it don't always work out that way. You noticed that kid in here a while ago? Name's Archie Bell. There's two brothers, Archie and Buck. Work for different outfits, good pals. I mean they was, until a girl came to this town a month or so ago."

Wanderin' blinked quickly and his eyes narrowed, as he looked at the back of the bartender.

"Both want the same girl?" His voice was a little husky.

"That's the idea," laughed the bartender. "Archie thought he had her, but he's scared Buck has cut him out. Dance tonight, you know. Archie says she ain't goin' with him—refused his bid, you see. Well—" shrugging his shoulders—"Archie's drunk, and his trigger finger itches."

The bartender laughed shortly and turned to look at Wanderin'.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly. "Sick?"

"I'm all right," breathed Wanderin', but his face was ashen.

"Better take a shot of likker, pardner."

"I never drink on Christmas Eve," he said huskily.

Wanderin' got slowly to his feet and began buttoning up his mackinaw. It had only one button, but he fumbled at the buttonholes, as he walked out of the warm saloon. The little Northwest town lay under a twelve inch blanket of snow, and the stars seemed fairly to crackle overhead. Several more saloon windows shed their yellow light on the snow piled street. Sleigh bells jingled somewhere. Smoky lantern over a livery stable door, the creak of wagon wheels on the dry snow.

Wanderin' crossed the street in front of a store, where the light barely filtered through the frosted windows. He was a stranger here. His horse was in the livery stable. A boy came from the store, carrying a bundle, and Wanderin' accosted him.

"Pardner, I'm a stranger here," he said, "and I'm lookin' for a family that jist moved here a month or so ago. I reckon there's a girl about—mebbe eighteen—in the family, and I—"

"Guess I know who you mean," said the boy. "They're the only ones that came here lately. I'm goin' past their place."

They went down the street together, turned at the corner and went out across the snow for nearly a quarter of a mile, where the lights of a home shone dimly.

"That's their place," said the boy.

"Thank you, pardner."

The boy went on, whistling. Wanderin' stopped at the sagging gate. Inside the house some one was playing an organ. Wanderin' listened, his hands tucked inside his mackinaw. Finally he

went in close to the front porch. It was warmer in there against the house. A girl was singing now, and Wanderin's body tensed, his hands clenching tightly.

SINGING "Forgetting." He almost cried out. It flung him back twenty years; wiped out twenty years of a wandering hell, and brought him back to the beginning again. There were two voices now—two women's voices. Wanderin's hand went to his mouth, as though to stifle a cry. The church bell was ringing again.

A horse and rider were coming across the snow, a moving blot against the white snow. They reached the gate, and the man dismounted. Now he was coming toward the door, reeling a little. There was a male voice in the song now. A sudden laugh, the music stopped.

"I can't carry a tune," laughed the male voice. "Archie's the singer in our family."

The man had reached the porch. He didn't see Wanderin' until the tall man was into him, fairly swinging him off his feet. A flash of light on a far flung six-shooter, a sudden heave, and Archie Bell went off the porch, falling headlong into the snow.

The clatter of their feet on the swept porch, a heave, perhaps a grunt, and Wanderin' Jones was standing alone at the door, panting a little, as the door opened. A tall, sweet faced girl was staring at him, while behind her stood a blond headed young man. No one spoke for a few moments. Then:

"Mebbe I got the wrong house," said Wanderin' slowly. "You see, I'm a stranger, and—"

"Well, come in and get warm," invited the girl. "It's awful cold out there."

Wanderin' removed his battered sombrero and came slowly in. There was a Christmas tree, all glittering with ornaments and candles, a crackling fireplace. He came farther in, and the girl closed the door.

"May I take your hat?" she asked.

But Wanderin' was staring at a woman who was framed in a doorway. Her hair was touched with gray, but she was still beautiful. Wanderin's eyes were wide with something akin to fright.

"Who was it, Emma?" asked a voice behind her, and a man came in, carrying an armful of wood.

She moved aside and he stopped in the doorway. He limped a little. Now he stopped and stared at Wanderin', his jaw sagging a little, and he swayed one shoulder against the side of the doorway. Twice his lips framed a name, before he spoke.

"Jim!"

Wanderin' Jones swayed, and the back of his right hand went to his thin lips, as he whispered—

"Harry!"

The man stooped over and placed the wood on the carpet. His face was working strangely, as if he wanted to cry.

"My God!" whispered Wanderin'. "That ain't you, Harry! You're . . ."

"Jim—really?" whispered the woman.

Wanderin' shook his head dumbly.

"Dreamin'," he said huskily. "It's Christmas Eve, and I'm dreamin' again."

"But you are not dreaming, Jim," insisted the woman. "How in the world did you ever come here?"

Wanderin' went slowly across the room. He seemed afraid to touch the other man. His face was twitching, his body hunched forward.

"It's me, Jimmy," said the man, choking a little. "We never knew where you went. We looked for you—oh, it wasn't because of the law. You was hot blooded. I didn't blame you, Jimmy. I—I reckon I'd have killed you—even if you was my brother—if you tried to take her away from me. I took her away from you, but it was because we loved each other."

"I thought I killed you, Harry."

"Close to it, Jimmy; got my hip. But that's forgotten. Laura—" he turned to the wondering girl—"this is your Uncle Jimmy. Jimmy, meet Buck Bell."

They shook hands gravely.

"I met your brother, Buck," said Wanderin'.

"Archie? Great kid. I didn't know he was comin' to town. I'll have to see him. Funny he didn't come down here, Laura. Mebbe he got sore because you wouldn't go to the dance with him. You see—" he turned to Wanderin'—"Archie is—well, he spends quite a lot of time down here. Laura thought it wouldn't be right to leave her folks and go to a dance tonight."

"You—you wasn't goin' to take her?" faltered Wanderin'.

Buck laughed softly.

"I never danced in my life; and I've got a girl down the valley. You see, I came here early this evenin', 'cause I was sure Archie would come, but I reckon he won't be here. I've got a new six-shooter to give him for a Christmas present."

"I—I reckon he needs a new one," said Wanderin' softly, and turned to look at the woman he had loved, and at the man, who was his brother.

"Uncle Jimmy, did you ever believe in Santy Claus?" asked Laura.

"I do," replied Wanderin' slowly, "and peace on earth . . . Now, you folks excuse me for a minute while I ask a young frien' of mine in, what's waitin' out here in the snow."

TO STIÓPA

(After seeing a Gypsy movie)

By VICTOR WEYBRIGHT

STIÓPA, where is your long black whip?
And where are your dancing bears?
Where's the mustache that drooped from your lip,
And why aren't you at the fairs?

Stiópa, where is your crimson sash,
And where are your pots to mend?
Have they gone along with the knotted lash
With tunes tied in the end?

Stiópa, where is your wrinkled wife,
And where is your jet-black son?
And what have you done with your Gypsy knife?
Where tethered the stolen dun?

Stiópa, you've made the Romani ryes
Terribly misunderstood.
You've sold your wife, your whip, your lies,
Your kettle—to Hollywood.

Continuing

JAMES B. HENDRYX'S

Stirring Novel of the Canadian Woods

MAN *of the* NORTH

AT NINETEEN Brian O'Neill was a full fledged man of the North. His father, old Kelly O'Neill, a retired Hudson's Bay Company factor, and the mission priest, Father Giroux, were openly proud of Brian. They understood the restless urge of youth which kept him roaming the wilds, living off the country—avoiding jobs. Brian had turned down bids by the Company and by the oil men. He had even laughed at Sam Crane's efforts to get him into the Mounties. Let them call him a ne'er-do-well. He was free . . .

When, at last, the prospect of a job caught Brian's fancy, he himself was more astonished than any one. Seth Adams of the Government Survey had struck him in the right spot; surveying the North, making maps, exploring far muskegs and lakes—that was not so bad, thought Brian. But at that time Brian was too stubborn and spoiled an individualist to accept Seth Adams's offer. He had been born north of 55°; Old Kelly O'Neill had taught him much; Father Giroux too had schooled him. He knew the North better than the Government men, for all their learning.

He struck off on a solitary jaunt of his own. Weeks passed. Brian was ready to return. He had found a new lake—but he had suddenly become very displeased with himself. Confronted with a problem in mapping, he realized his ignorance, and he remembered that Adams had said that if he decided to join the Government Survey, the job—as guide—was still open. He was fired with the ambition of the explorer. He would join the survey party. He might even go to college . . . He would return at once to Fort Chipewyan and find Seth Adams . . .

At the moment of departing, his keen eyes suddenly caught sight of three columns of smoke—the distress signal of the North. Regardless of danger, he set out in the direction of the signal, down a cañon creek that pitched him over a high waterfall. At the foot of the falls, remote and hidden, was a cabin.

In the brush and banksian by the creek was old Jovin Beauleau, wounded by a bullet from his own rifle. His daughter, Annette, had signaled for help. Old Beauleau had been on the way to Fort Chipewyan to receive his mail and had stum-

bled, accidentally discharging the gun.

A year before he had written to his estranged sister in Quebec for financial assistance in developing a mine. He claimed he had discovered a lode. Brian tried to save Jovin Beauleau's life by operating and probing for the bullet. Old Jovin regained consciousness only long enough to whisper:

"The gold—look after the girl—I go to join your mother, Annette—"

Then he died.

Brian stole outside, by the flowered grave of Beauleau's wife, leaving Annette alone in the cabin with her sorrow.

CHAPTER IX

RECONSTRUCTION

FOR A LONG time Annette Beauleau lay, while her sobbing subsided into short catchy breaths. In vain she tried to think, but her overwrought brain refused to function beyond the simple realization that her father was dead. Jovin Beauleau—her constant companion and, since the death of her mother three years before, her only companion—was gone. Her world had crashed. Her life, always so simple, must become some other kind of life of which she did not know. In vain she tried to envision the future. Her contacts with people had been limited to wandering Indians, to an occasional trip to Fort Chipewyan—and to Brian O'Neill.

She could hear Brian now, moving about outside. She had

scarcely noticed. Was it minutes or hours ago that he had gently disengaged his hand from hers, and tiptoed across the floor, as though fearing to awaken her? The door to the tool house creaked noisily. There was a short interval of silence, and then the ring of a pick on rocks, the rasping scrape of a shovel, the thud of earth. There was something terrible in those sounds.

With clenched hands and tight pressed lips the girl lay listening as inch by inch, foot by foot, Brian O'Neill drove the grave deeper and deeper into the stony ground. An hour passed, two hours. He would soon be through. Then she and Brian would carry the body and lower it into the grave . . . And there would be two mounds on the bluff overlooking the river where her mother used to sit and sew in the long twilight while her father read to her from books, and she herself played with the malemute puppies, or with the grotesque wooden doll that the old Indian had carved for her years before. Dry-eyed, she recalled those later days, when only she and her father were left. They used to sit and talk while the shadows lengthened, and play their serious game of make-believe, pretending that the mother lying there was listening. Now only she was left, she and the grotesque doll. Slipping from the bed, she lifted the cover from a box, reached beneath her neatly piled clothing and withdrew the hideous puppet in its dress of striped Yarmouth druggets. Hugging the doll to her breast, she threw herself on the bed where her sobbing broke out afresh as she pressed the carved wooden face to her lips.

As the storm of weeping subsided she realized that the sounds from the outside had ceased. A shadow darkened the doorway. Hastily thrusting the doll beneath her pillow, she dried her eyes and stood up to meet the steady gaze of Brian O'Neill.

"Annette," he was saying, "I dug the grave. We will lay him beside your mother."

"Shall we go, now?" she asked simply, bracing herself with a visible effort.

He nodded and, without a word, turned and led the way to the banksian grove where they paused and stood one on either side of the rude operating table whereon the form of Jovin Beauleau lay covered with a blanket.

Removing his hat and fumbling its brim, Brian stood with downcast eyes as Annette, stepping closer, raised the blanket and stood looking down into the dead face. Presently she stooped, and with an inarticulate choking sound, kissed the bloodless forehead.

"Goodby, my father," she faltered, "oh—oh—goodby!"

Then, resolutely, she covered the face and, stepping to the foot of the table, took her position at the poles.

Brian had rigged a sling, and when the body had been lowered gently, there was an awkward silence as the two stood looking down into the freshly made grave. Finally their eyes met and Brian spoke:

"Is there—a book—prayers, or something you would like to have read? I have heard Father Giroux read prayers—at—at times like this."

The girl shook her head.

"No. When we buried my mother he read from the book of prayers, because he thought she would have wanted it so. He did not believe as she did. But he was a good man to my mother—and always he was a good father to me."

"And no prayer ever written can add anything to that," said Brian in a tone of such whole hearted conviction that the girl looked up in surprise.

"Why, yes, Brian, that is true, isn't it?"

"I think your father would rather have heard those words from your lips than all the prayers in all the books that were ever printed. I would rather leave such a monument in the heart of one I loved than have my name cut on a stone as tall as a mountain."

Tears welled into the girl's eyes; she opened her lips as if to speak, faltered and, turning abruptly away, entered the door of the cabin.

Brian filled the grave, mounded the earth over it with care and, walking to

the river, sat on the gravel to think.

In the cabin Annette lay on her bunk and for a long time stared dry eyed at the ceiling. She tried to think, but her brain seemed numb. Presently the ticking of the clock drew her eyes toward it, and she leaped to her feet. Two o'clock! They had eaten nothing since morning! She was surprised to find that she was very hungry. And Brian, who had done all the work, must be nearly starved. She stepped to the door and looked out. A mound, raw and yellow in its ugly newness, appeared beside the grass grown mound.

Brian was not in sight, neither near the mound nor in the banksian grove. Sudden panic seized her. Had he gone and left her alone? No! And yet, why not? He would go sometime. And she would stay. This was her home, the only home she had ever known. There was no place to go.

"He would not go without seeing me again. He could not. In his eyes I saw it—He—he will not leave me."

She whispered the words, and as if in corroboration she glanced at his things, piled neatly where she had laid them, dried and mended. Walking to the edge of the bluff, she glanced downward and saw him stretched at full length on the gravel beside the river, his face buried in his arms.

RETURNING to the cabin, she lighted the fire and prepared dinner, and when it was ready she again stepped to the bluff and called. The meal was eaten almost in silence, and in silence Brian dried the dishes as she washed them. Then, abruptly, he spoke.

"Let's go outside," he said, and when he led the way, she followed to a spot of shade near the top of the bluff overlooking the river.

Throwing himself on the ground, he filled his pipe and settled back against a rock while she seated herself with her back against the bole of a banksian.

"What are you going to do, Annette?" he asked after a few moments of strained silence.

"Why—I—I do not know. There is nothing to do. Stay here, and—and—why just stay—"

Brian shook his head.

"You can't do that—"

"Why not? This is my home. I do not want to go away. There is no place to go."

"Listen, Annette. Do you know how your father lived?"

"How he lived?"

"I mean how did he get the money to buy food and clothing and books. He was not a trapper. I know he spoke something about gold."

"Yes, he always searched for gold. He found the gold. For last fall he told me that we soon should be rich. At the time of the Christmas trading he wrote a letter and took it to Fort Chipewyan. I do not know who he wrote the letter to, but I think it was about the gold. It must have been of that letter he tried to speak. Would he not write letters about gold?"

"Why, yes—I suppose he would. But had he taken out any gold? Did he trade gold for his supplies at Fort Chipewyan?"

"No, I do not think he had any gold. I never saw any gold. He had paper money. He got the money at Chipewyan, and then he bought the supplies."

"But how did he get the money?"

"The factor gave it to him. I do not know why. I never asked my father. Always he would get the money from the factor and would buy the supplies, and if there was any money left he would bring it home. He kept it in a small box beneath his bed, and when he would start for Chipewyan he would take it out and put it in his pocketbook. I do not know why he did that. At the Fort he would always get more money. I think the pocketbook with the money is in his pocket, now."

"No. I removed the things from his pockets. They are here."

Stepping to the net box beside the rude operating table, Brian returned in a mo-

ment with a neatly made caribou skin wallet, a knife, a waterproof matchbox, a pipe and a small sack of tobacco, which he laid in the girl's lap.

"You had better count the money."

"You must help," she said, listlessly opening the wallet. "I have never counted money. I know, of course, that these papers are worth the number of dollars that is stamped upon them. But I do not understand why this should be so. My father has told me that it has to do with banks and with the Government. But I am afraid I did not care enough about it to remember what he said."

Together they counted the money.

"One hundred and sixteen dollars," announced Brian. "Is that all he had, or is there more in the box under his bunk?"

"We will look. But I think there will be none, for he was bound for Chipewyan when—when he was shot. Why do you ask? Is that much money, or little? And will not the factor give us more if we need it?"

Brian smiled.

"It is more than I have. It will last you for awhile. I will speak to Leith and he will give you more when that is gone. But this gold of your father's? Do you know where he found it?"

"No. I know only that he told me he had found it, and that soon we would be rich. I did not care much, except that I was glad he had found the gold that he had searched for so long. It gave him much happiness. Why should one want to be rich? We have always had all we wanted, and we have many times helped the Indians, who, some years, are very poor. One could not do more if he were rich, could he?"

"I don't understand any more than you do why any one should want to be rich. For myself, a good outfit and plenty to eat, and I'm happy. Except that I want to know a lot more than I do."

"Why should you want to know more? Are you going to a school?"

"I don't know that I will go to a school. But I'm going to learn some way. I'm going to talk with Father Giroux and Seth Adams. I am just beginning to realize how little I know. And I'll never be happy till I learn all about a lot of things."

Annette looked doubtful.

"I do not think that great learning brings happiness. My father was a man of great learning. My mother told me that he had been educated to be a scientist. In the house are many books from which he often read—books I do not understand, for I have not great learning. I have watched him as he read these books, and I could not see that they made him happy. Only was he happy when he was with my mother, and with me. He found his happiness in us, not in books."

"But think of the satisfaction of knowing about many things."

"I do not think that brings happiness," answered the girl stubbornly. "I have been more happy than my father, and I do not know about many things. My mother and my father taught me to read and to write in English, and in French, and in German; and I have read the histories, and have studied geography, and something of philosophy, and of biology. Philosophy I do not like, but I read much of it, mostly in the German, because my father wanted me to. But I do not think it has added to my happiness."

"I should like to have known your father."

"You would have loved him. No one could help loving him. He was always so kind, and so good, and so patient. He first met my mother when he was going to a college, and they wanted to be married, but her father and my father's father were bitter enemies—it was something about politics which I do not understand—and they commanded my father and mother not to marry. But they could not keep them from loving each other, and when my father finished at the college he came into possession of a small amount of money from the estate of his mother, who was dead. So he and my mother went away and got married. The families of each were terribly angry, and would have nothing more to do with them.

Both my mother's father and my father's father were very rich, but they cut my mother and my father off without one dollar of all the money they had—because they loved each other and were married! So others got all of the money, and my father and my mother came away from there, and have always lived in the North where my father searched for gold."

THE GIRL ceased speaking, and minutes passed as Brian puffed slowly at his pipe. Finally he broke the silence.

"They did what was right—your father and mother—and I am sure the happiness they found in each other, and in you, and in the North, was far greater than any happiness they could have got out of the riches of their fathers. These old men must have died long ago, but their children—the brothers and sisters of your father and mother—may still be living, some of them. Do you know the names of these people, your aunts and your uncles?"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, her eyes widening, and a slight flush deepening the brown of her cheeks.

"Only that if you could get in touch with them, go to them, maybe, and tell them—"

"Go to them? Go to those people who treated my mother and my father as they did? Who drove them out and withheld from them that which rightfully belonged to them! No, I do not know their names! And I do not want to know them!"

She pointed a trembling finger toward the mounds and her deep, rich voice shook with passion.

"There lie the two I loved and who loved me! Do you suppose, now that they are dead, that I would go crawling to those who scorned them, who cast them out, who despised and persecuted them? If you do, you do not know how a Beauleau or a Fontenelle can hate! If I should go to those people I would be a traitor to the love of my mother and my father. On these graves I swear I will never go to them—never speak their names! I would spit upon them, strike them in the face, shoot them!"

Astounded at the outburst of hatred, Brian could only stare speechless until it was concluded. Never, he thought, had the girl seemed so beautiful as with blazing eyes she castigated her people. A tragic figure, superb in her hatred, facing a world of which she knew nothing, with spirit unbroken. He smiled to relieve the tension, to soften the girl's mood.

"In that case," he said, "maybe you better not go."

"I will never go to them. I would die first."

"But you can't stay here alone. The Indians have gone from the lake. There is food enough for only a little while. A thousand things might happen—accidents, sickness. The very loneliness would kill you or drive you mad. The long hours of brooding—then voices in the night, voices that are not there, eyes peering from the silent dark, things moving without sound, without color, without form, or with sounds, and colors and forms that never were—delirium—madness, which is worse than death."

There were tears in the girl's eyes and she dropped to her knees beside him and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Then, Brian, you must stay here, too!"

The touch of her hand, her words, set his heart pounding.

"But—Annette—"

She interrupted hurriedly, before he could voice an objection:

"Listen, Brian. You love me—in your eyes I have seen it—and I love you. I love you even more, I think, than I loved my father and my mother. It is a different love—this love for you is a love that is almost like pain. Stay here with me, Brian, and we will live here even as my father and my mother lived here until they died. And together we will search for my father's gold, and together we will hunt, and fish, and read. And I will look after you always, and cook, and—"

The impassioned entreaty of the words, the light in her hazel eyes, not blazing,

now, but looking deep into his own with soft adoration; the touch of her hand all but swept Brian into the engulfing vortex of young love. Almost, he reached his two arms for her—almost. Then, steeling himself as a man fights against odds with his back to the wall, he spoke, and the words sounded flat and vapid in his ears.

"But—we are not married."

"I do not care. Why should we care what the world thinks? We two, alone. You are all I need in life—and you will learn that I am all you need. The Beauleaus and the Fontenelles can hate—and they can love as they hate—and I am both a Beauleau and a Fontenelle! I suppose you are right. We should be married. We can find this Father Giroux of whom you spoke. He is a priest of the church of my mother. He shall marry us, and we will return and bring our supplies with us from Chipewyan. Come! Let us go. We can camp tonight on the lake."

But Brian was silent, fighting desire and the longing to gather her into his arms and carry her to Father Giroux, and to return to this little cabin beside the unmapped river. He knew he loved this girl. And he knew she had spoken the truth when she said that he would learn that she was all he needed. But would life here in the cabin satisfy—on down through the years? Even though they should find old Jovin Beauleau's gold, if indeed, he had found gold. Here in his North would not everything taunt him with his ignorance, now that he had come to realize that ignorance?

Mistaking his silence for coldness, Annette rose abruptly to her feet and, glancing into her face, Brian saw that the light was gone from her eyes and the color had faded from her cheeks.

"You do not want me," she said, and the voice that a moment before had been vibrant with love sounded toneless and cold.

As she turned from him he caught her hand and, leaping to his feet, stood looking down upon the midnight darkness of her hair. He spoke, and the calmness of his own voice surprised him.

"I do want you, Annette! I want you more than any words can tell. I want you—and some day I will have you. But not now. I have determined to get an education—to learn many things. If I could marry you now, and get my education I would do it. That is impossible, for I have no money. We will go, as you say, to Father Giroux and you can live at the mission until I have got my education. Then we will be married."

"Go and get your education!" Her hand was jerked violently from his own and the girl faced him with blazing eyes. "I do not love you! I hate you! Go back to your rivers and your provinces! What do I care? I shall stay here! I hope I *will* die! I hope I *will* go mad!" And, turning abruptly, she fled from him and disappeared within the doorway of the cabin.

FOR SOME moments Brian stood where she had left him. Then, knocking the ashes from his pipe, he walked to the new made grave, picked up the tools, carried them into the pole shed and secured the door. Descending to the river, he righted the canoe, took his empty pack sack from it and, entering the cabin without a glance toward the bunk, proceeded methodically to stow his belongings.

When he had finished he set the sack outside and, reentering the cabin, stood for a moment looking down at the girl who lay on her blankets, her face buried in her arms.

"Get up, Annette," he said in the same level voice in which he had outlined his plans.

Receiving no reply, nor the slightest movement that told him she had heard, he turned from the bunk and very deliberately began to pack the two pack sacks he found in the cabin—the one Jovin Beauleau had carried on his fatal journey, and another he found hanging from a peg on the wall. From other pegs he removed several dresses and a nightgown which he carefully folded and stowed in the top

of a pack. Opening the box from which Annette had taken the wooden doll, he transferred all her wearing apparel to the pack, and from beneath her bunk he withdrew several pairs of moccasins and a pair of stout boots which he also stowed. From the table he selected a knife, a fork, a spoon and a plate, and when these had joined the other things, he glanced about the room, looked to the fastening of the single window, carried the two packs outside, and returned to the bunk.

"It is time to go, Annette," he said. "Tonight we will camp on the lake."

The words fell upon the ears of the girl in the tone of velvet softness she had heard once before, and she knew that behind the softly spoken words was the chilled steel that was the will of Brian O'Neill. She knew that her things were packed. By the sounds as he moved about the cabin she had followed his every movement. There had been something terrible, inexorable about those methodical, unhurried movements. Over and over again as the sounds progressed her brain had repeated the words:

"I hate him! I hate him! I hate him!"

And hate him or not, she knew that nothing she could say or do would bend that iron will one hair's breadth from the course it had mapped out.

"It is time to go," he had said. "Tonight we will camp on the lake."

And she knew that she must go, and that tonight they would camp on the lake.

She stood up and faced him, her eyes meeting his in a gaze as calm and as level as his own.

"I hate you," she said.

He nodded without speaking and, stepping past her, stripped the blankets from her bunk. As he did so the grotesque wooden doll thudded to the floor.

"What's that?" he asked, eyeing the puppet in surprise.

Stooping swiftly, she gathered it into her arms.

"The only thing in the world that I love," she answered, and waited in silence till he made the blankets into a pack.

Following him outside, she waited while he closed and secured the door by means of a wooden pin. Without a word he picked up two of the packs and carried them to the canoe. When he turned to go for the others, he found Annette standing beside him with the pack and the blanket roll at her feet. He opened his lips to speak, but the girl turned away, and in silence he stowed the duffle amidships. Without a word the girl picked up a paddle and took her place in the bow.

At the foot of the falls they cached the canoe in its accustomed place and, as Brian reached for his two packs, he noted that the girl was already skilfully adjusting her tump-line. As she picked up the blanket roll he reached for it.

"I'll take that," he said, and when she refused to surrender it, he motioned her to precede him up the trail.

"Afraid I will run away if your back is turned?" she asked.

Brian ignored the sneer in the voice.

"No. I want you to set the pace."

A mighty rage welled within her as she struck off up the rocky trail. Who was this man all sufficient unto himself who had come thus suddenly into her life to dominate it, to change its course, to order her comings and her goings? He was not afraid she would try to escape, because he knew she could not escape him and worst of all he knew that she knew this. He offered to pack more than his share of the outfit—her outfit, for the most part—and he had made her set the pace for the obvious reason that he did not want to tire her, or to leave her far behind on the trail. Vividly his words repeated themselves in her brain—

"I want you, and some day I will have you."

The calm assurance of the statement stung her as no flaunting or boasting could have stung her. There was no flaunting or boasting about Brian O'Neill. With the utmost self-confidence he went ahead and did the things he could do, and the things he could not do he calmly asserted that he would learn to do.

"I will never marry him—never!" she

murmured to herself. "I hate him! And it is a long way from here to the mission of this Father Giroux!"

CHAPTER X

AN AFFAIR OF BUSINESS

SEATED at her desk in the boudoir of her palatial Quebec home, Madame Latrobe read for the third time the letter that had come by the morning post carefully folded in a packet that contained several small fragments of rough looking rock. For a long time she sat staring at the letter and idly fingering the rock fragments, as her brain followed the back trail of the years. So Jovin was still alive—this brother who so many years ago had defied his family, relinquished a fortune, and with his young bride had disappeared from the ken of all who had known him.

And now he was writing to offer her a half interest in a venture that promised a fortune for each. She picked up the letter and once again scanned the lines:

> We have lived continually in the outlands, and in each other, and in our little daughter we have found contentment and happiness . . . three years ago my wife died . . . I care nothing for wealth. It is not for myself, but for my daughter that I am asking that you finance this enterprise . . .

The finely chiseled lips set in a hard line as Madame Latrobe's eyes wandered from the letter to the richly appointed furnishings of the room. So he had found contentment and happiness in a cabin—in a tent, maybe. Living like a savage, he had found contentment and happiness. While she, with the inherited wealth that should have been half Jovin's, had known neither happiness nor contentment.

In marrying Aristide Latrobe she had followed the dictate of her father. A truly fine match, people said at the time, in that it brought together two families of social prominence and vast wealth. She laughed, a hard, bitter laugh at remembrance of some of the devilishly ingenious cruelties of Aristide Latrobe. Thank God he spent most of his time in Paris and on the Riviera! And Celeste, their daughter—a Latrobe through and through. Happiness, contentment . . . and again the hard bitter laugh. If Jovin only knew how little of the Beauleau fortune was left—this home and an annuity; nothing more.

Cold rage seized the woman. Snatching up the letter, she crumpled it and stamped upon it. Who was Jovin to taunt her with his happiness? She had found life an ugly thing, a thing of hollow pleasures and bitter disillusionments.

Another paper caught her eye—the certified report of a firm of assayers. The analysis meant next to nothing to her: gold, silver, lead, in their various proportions; but penned across the bottom were the words:

> These samples constitute a high grade galena extraordinarily rich in gold.

Jovin had found gold and he needed her help to get it.

Jovin had made his bed, now let him lie in it! Let his gold rot in the hills! His daughter was also a daughter of a Fontenelle. The very name of Fontenelle gave Madame Latrobe pause. If she should ignore this letter, what more natural than that Jovin would apply to the Fontenelles for the money to finance the operations? The Fontenelle wealth had not been dissipated as had the Beauleau fortune. There was Darien Fontenelle, the brother of Jovin's wife—a man of character and business ability. Suppose he had not harbored the hatred of the Fontenelles against this sister who had committed the crime of marrying a Beauleau.

As her rage flamed at the thought, the woman's eyes gleamed with an almost insane light. At least she had never ceased to hate. The very name of Fontenelle was anathema in her ears. Never if she could help it would Darien Fontenelle profit by Jovin's gold. Perhaps she could find the money. She wondered how much would be needed. The mansion and its furnishings were her own. She could raise a goodly sum on them.

Aristide Latrobe need never know of the venture, nor would he ever see a penny of the gold that would be hers. She would be in a position to drive a hard bargain. Jovin, with his years in the outlands, would know little of business. And Jovin's daughter, a little savage who was also the daughter of a Fontenelle, would know nothing at all.

Picking the crumpled letter from the floor, she smoothed it. "Fort Chipewyan —wherever that is," she muttered, and then, half aloud she read:

> "I will go to Fort Chipewyan toward the last of June. A letter will reach me there, or if you desire to send an agent I will meet him. If he should be delayed until after that time, he will find an Indian at Chipewyan named Johnny Big Fish, who will guide him to my cabin . . ."

She laid the letter aside with a shrug.

"Ugh—Johnny Big Fish—Fort Chipewyan—names that fairly reek of the wilderness and of savagery."

For a long time she sat thinking. Then, suddenly, she sprang erect. Diamonds flashed as she clapped her hands together.

"The very man!" she breathed. "Thibaut Colbert will stop at nothing to gain an end. He has traveled the wilderness and he hates Aristide Latrobe! At least my secret will be safe from my husband with him!"

AN HOUR later Thibaut Colbert was shown into the room, a large man, whose shifty eyes seemed to dart from beneath beetling black brows. He took the proffered chair with a bow, and came directly to the point.

"You sent for me, madame? I am surprised that I should be summoned to the home of Aristide Latrobe."

"To the home of his wife," returned the woman haughtily.

"An important distinction," he observed, with a knowing smile. "And monsieur is—"

"In France."

"And the reason I am honored?"

"A matter of business. It is possible that we may enter into an arrangement that will be profitable to both. Do you know anything of gold?"

"I have not the intimate acquaintance with it that I could wish," answered the man with a smile.

"I mean gold as it is found in mines."

"I have had some experience in mining ventures."

"Do you know what these are?" She handed him the samples, and noted that his eyes gleamed with avarice as he scrutinized them.

"It looks like a high grade ore, but I would not venture an opinion until I had seen a report—"

"The report is here."

She handed him the paper and he studied it for a time before looking up. When he returned the paper she noted that his hand was not quite steady.

"The most promising proposition I have ever seen," he said, evidently striving to disguise the eagerness in his voice. "Who made the strike? And where? What has it to do with you? And why am I called in?"

"My brother found the gold. He has appealed to me because he is unable to finance the enterprise. And I have appealed to you because—because—"

She hesitated, and the man smiled cynically.

"Let us, at least, be frank between ourselves, madame. Primarily you have appealed to me because you are certain that nothing that passes between us will reach the ears of your husband. Secondly, because you know that I have spent much time beyond the outposts of civilization and have been interested, more or less intimately, in mining ventures. Thirdly, because you believe I would not hesitate to violate, shall we say, the ethics, to gain an end. If I am right in my surmises, I may add that I think you have chosen wisely. So we lay our cards upon the table. This brother you mentioned—I presume that he will demand the lion's share in this venture? And by the way, you forgot to tell me where it is."

"He offered me a half interest if I would finance it. I hate him! I would take every dollar if I could. The more you succeed in wresting from him, the better I will be pleased. Do you care to undertake the venture?"

"You have not told me where it is."

The woman smiled.

"You will pardon me if I withhold that information until you have given me your answer."

"As an equal partner, share and share alike in whatever interest we may obtain?" The woman hesitated, and Colbert continued, "Remember, madame, your part is merely to furnish the funds to place this enterprise upon a paying basis; while mine is not only to investigate the property, but to make an advantageous agreement with your brother, and to manage the venture ostensibly as your agent. I may add that if there is any considerable deposit as rich as these samples show, we neither of us need fear for the future. As an equal partner with you, my own interests would be identical with yours."

The woman nodded slowly.

"I suppose you are right. You drive a hard bargain. I hope you will do as well with my brother. Do you know where Fort Chipewyan is?"

"Yes."

"It is there you may meet my brother, Jovin Beauleau, at the end of June."

The man smiled.

"Which means that I must start at once and travel fast. Suppose I miss him at Chipewyan? It is a long journey to make for nothing."

"Should you not meet him there, you are to find an Indian named—" she paused and referred to the letter—"named Johnny Big Fish, and he will guide you to my brother's cabin. But maybe you had best read the letter."

Colbert read and re-read the letter.

"There is a daughter, then?"

He was quick to note the gleam of hate that leaped into the woman's eyes as she answered:

"Yes. Doubtless a half savage thing that has lived her life among the Indians of the wilderness. It should not be hard for one of your ability to further our interests at the expense of theirs."

"I think," smiled the man, "that you may safely leave the matter in my hands. And now—the matter of expense. I shall need for this preliminary investigation, at least—one thousand dollars."

"How much money will I be asked to advance? And how long will it be before we will begin to profit by the venture?"

"That, my dear madame, will depend entirely upon circumstances—the availability of the ore, its location in regard to water, and transportation, and a hundred and one things that can only be determined by a thorough investigation. You shall have my report upon my return."

"When shall you start?"

"That depends entirely upon you—and the thousand dollars."

"If I hand you the money within the hour?"

"I shall be on board the first train that leaves Quebec for the west tomorrow morning."

"Call then in an hour. And when may I look for your return?"

The man shrugged.

"Two months—six—one can not tell. You will note that the letter you just received was posted at Chipewyan at Christmas."

When the man had gone Madame Latrobe picked up the letter which, together with the assayers' report and the samples, she placed in a wall safe.

"Happiness! Contentment!" The words fairly snarled from her drawn lips, and the door closed with a sharp click upon her hard, bitter laugh.

CHAPTER XI

BACK AT THE CABIN

IN SILENCE Brian O'Neill and Annette Beauleau dragged the canoe from its cache at the upper end of the portage trail, took their places and paddled across the lake. And in silence they ate their supper as the long twilight faded into starlit dark. When the meal

was finished Brian picked up his blankets and, without a word, disappeared into the deep blackness of the bordering spruce forest.

Beside the dying embers of the little cooking fire Annette sat tense, listening to the cracking of twigs and the swish of branches that told of the man's progress through the thick timber. Presently the sounds ceased and she knew he was spreading his blankets. Her anger flamed afresh at this new manifestation of his supreme self-assurance. The canoe was on the beach, her things in their pack sacks beside it, yet he had not taken the slightest precaution to prevent her from launching the canoe and paddling back to the cabin. Against her will, and in the face of her angry protests, he had ordered her to accompany him to the mission; therefore she would accompany him to the mission. And that was the end of it. He had walked away and spread his blankets and was probably even now soundly asleep.

Out on the lake a loon laughed mockingly.

Red embers faded into gray ash. From the silence of the sedge a night bird croaked hoarsely. The girl rose to her feet, stood for tense moments peering into the dense blackness that had swallowed Brian O'Neill, and swiftly and silently made her way to the canoe. For a moment she stood under the glittering stars. Impulsively she stretched out her arms toward the little cabin beyond the black waters, the little cabin she had always called home. Hot tears filled her eyes.

In the blurred starlight she launched the canoe, her heart in her throat as its bark bottom scraped softly on the gravel. Shipping her pack sacks, blankets and paddles, she pushed noiselessly out into the lake.

She camped that night on the trail at the head of the portage with the width of the lake between herself and Brian O'Neill. In the morning she cached the canoe and with one of her packs and her blanket roll strode swiftly down the trail, launched the other canoe and so arrived at the cabin where she cooked and ate a hearty breakfast. She returned upriver for the other pack. The rest of the day she spent in tidying up the cabin and carefully stowing her things into their accustomed places. Toward evening she strolled to the bluff overlooking the river and for a long, long time stood looking down at the two mounds. Then she went to bed and after a time fell asleep with the grotesque wooden doll clutched tightly to her breast.

After breakfast next morning she chopped and piled a quantity of firewood. She took inventory of the food that Brian had packed down, estimated its value, and decided it would last a month if she had good luck with her nets and her rifle. By that time Brian O'Neill would be far away, and she would make the journey to Fort Chipewyan, leave money to repay Brian with the factor, and purchase supplies to last until Christmas. She was glad she had returned to the cabin. Things would go on about the same as before, except that she would miss her father, the reading aloud and the long talks in the twilight.

She spent a couple of hours setting nets in the river. When the task was finished and she stepped from her canoe, her eye was attracted to a piece of cloth that lay half concealed by the coarse grass close to the water's edge. Idly she walked over and stood looking down at the shirt stained with blood and sweat that she had tossed aside when Brian O'Neill would have drawn it on over his lacerated shoulders. Slowly she stooped, picked up the shirt and, stepping to the water, put it to soak, weighting it down with stones. In the evening she washed it and hung it on a limb to dry.

She awoke early the following morning and, water pail in hand, walked to the spring beside the river. Dropping the pail she stooped eagerly to examine the tracks of a moose that showed in the gravel and in the mud between the spring and the river. A cow, or a young bull, she decided, traveling slowly, probably

making for the shallows of a backwater three or four miles downriver. Racing to the cabin, she snatched up the rifle and half a dozen cartridges and a few moments later was paddling swiftly downstream.

The animal was not in the shallows. Beaching the canoe, she struck off to the westward where, a couple of miles inland, a sedgy lake that was a favorite feeding place for moose lay between the timber and a broad muskeg. Often she had helped her father to pack moose meat from the lake to the canoe. As she neared the lake she crept cautiously through the thick scrub, her objective being a point that separated two shallow bays.

SHE HAD almost reached the edge when a mighty splashing startled her and, crashing through the shrub, she was just in time to see two moose disappear into the thicket not fifty yards away. She stood for a moment, a puzzled frown on her face. Surely, she had made no sound; not even a tiny twig had crackled beneath her moccasins. Then, she knew —and the knowledge brought a flush of anger to her cheeks—the wind. So intent had she been in proceeding noiselessly that she had forgotten to take into account the light breeze that was blowing directly from her to the spot where the moose had been feeding. A glaring bit of carelessness. A thing one might expect of a chechako, but not of one who had spent her whole life in the bush. If she must expect to live by her rifle she could not afford to make mistakes.

She would get some traps when she went to Chipewyan. Johnny Big Fish had taught her how to set for the fur bearers. Her anger faded, and she smiled as she remembered Johnny Big Fish, the young Indian who had camped the previous winter across the river from the cabin, and whose trap line extended for miles along the river and among the lakes to the westward. He had wanted to marry her, and had become so insistent that her father had chased him from the river.

She liked Johnny Big Fish. At least he would never order her to leave her home and go and live at a mission. Her father had said he was lazy because he hung about the fort all summer. But in the winter he worked hard at his traps; why should he not hang about the fort in the summer? Her father did nothing in winter but shoot a few caribou and read his books—and winter is longer than summer. Johnny Big Fish would be at the fort, now. Vaguely she wondered what he would do when he learned that her father was dead.

Back at the cabin she stood the rifle in its corner and ate a hearty breakfast, for she was ravenously hungry and it was nearly noon. She was still at the table when a shadow darkened the room and she looked up to see a man standing in the doorway. He was a large man and his lips were smiling, even as his bright shifty eyes seemed to dart from beneath shaggy black eyebrows to take in every detail of the room. When at length they came to rest upon her she shrank from their penetrating glance. There was something loathsome, something she hated in those eyes. She felt suddenly ashamed—as though she sat there naked before their searching gaze. Then the smiling lips moved.

"Where is Jovin Beauleau?"

"Who are you?" countered the girl. "And why do you want to see my father?"

"A matter of business, my pretty one—purely a matter of business."

"Is it about the letter?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes. You can see his grave beside the grave of my mother, there near the edge of the bluff."

The man turned and for several moments he stared at the freshly heaped mound. As he faced her again his eyes seemed to gleam even more brightly.

"And you are living here alone?"

"Yes. Alone. And, now, I wish you would go away. You can not see my father."

"Ha-ha! Not so fast, my beauty! Seeing we're all so cosy here, and no one to bother, I can do business with you, perhaps, even better than with your father."

"What do you mean?" The words came hurriedly, jerkily, and in her heart Annette Beauleau realized that for the first time in her life she knew the meaning of fear.

The man stepped boldly into the cabin, crossed to her side and laid a hand upon her shoulder. She shrank from the touch, and again he laughed.

"I mean just this: You and I have a very good thing—in fact, we're rich. Jovin Beauleau never filed his claim. All we've got to do is to step out and file in our own names—and the old lady can whistle for hers!"

The girl was on her feet now facing him, the table between them.

"I do not understand a thing you are saying. Go away from here."

"Not so fast, Star Eyes; I am not going away. In fact, I expect to stay here for quite some time. I like the surroundings, and I am charmed by the company. When you and I understand each other we will get along famously."

"Who are you?" cried the girl, her heart cold with terror. "Where do you come from? Why are you here?"

"Now we progress," answered the man approvingly.

He settled into her father's chair, removed his hat and placed it upon the floor beside him.

"Be seated, please. We have business to transact and we may as well discuss it in comfort."

Annette remained standing, and he continued:

"My name is Thibaut Colbert. I am, let us say, a business adventurer. I am here at the earnest solicitation of your most estimable aunt."

"My aunt?"

"Yes, the sister of your father—"

"I hate them!" cried the girl. "I hate them all!"

"Than which there could be no more holy sentiment," agreed the man, rolling his eyes in mock piety. "I fear they are not to be trusted. But, to return to our business, your father wrote to her, enclosing ore samples and offering her a half interest in his venture if she would finance it. Knowing nothing of mining, and having reason to distrust her husband, she appealed to me as a man of sterling character, offering me a half interest in all or any part of the property that I could wrest from you and your father. In other words, she would be overjoyed to freeze you and your father out entirely and divide the property with me. I had little sympathy with her dishonest scheme and, since meeting you, my dear, I have still less.

"In fact, I have so little sympathy with it, that I have decided to leave her out of our plans entirely—serve her as she would have served you and your father. Very fortunately, your father neglected, through accident or design, to file his claim, which fact reduces our problem to one of utmost simplicity. We will file the claim, or claims, and should the property prove to be anywhere near as valuable as the samples indicate, we will make millions. What do you say?"

THE GIRL leaned forward upon the knuckles of her doubled fists, her eyes meeting unflinchingly the restless eyes of the man.

"I say exactly what I said before. Go away from here and leave me alone. I know nothing of claims and samples and financing. If you do not go I think I will kill you!"

The man ignored the threat.

"You know your father found gold?"

"Yes, but I do not want gold."

The words were received with a smile.

"In that case, my dear, we can quickly strike a bargain. It is merely that you show me the place where your father found his gold, and I will agree to go away and molest you no further."

"I do not know where he found the gold. And if I did know I would never tell you."

The man leaped to his feet with a snarl.

"You lie, you damned huzzy! You do know! And you will talk. I've made people talk before."

He lurched toward her, overturning the table, and with a scream she tried to slip past him. But he was too quick for her, cutting off her retreat to the door. For a long moment the two stood facing each other.

"Go away," she cried hysterically, "or I'll kill you!"

A sneering laugh greeted the words and, as the man was about to advance upon her, he saw the hazel eyes stare past him out through the open door. A glad cry broke from the girl's lips—

"Johnny Big Fish!"

The man whirled, whipping an automatic from his holster under his arm. As the Indian leaped with drawn knife, two reports rang almost as one, and Johnny Big Fish crashed to the floor just within the threshold. The body strained convulsively, relaxed, and lay still. Colbert raised his eyes to the horror widened eyes of the girl, who was staring in a daze at Johnny Big Fish, the long knife still clutched in his dead hand.

"It was self-defense," he muttered, more to himself than to the girl.

She, oblivious to the words, had dropped to her knees beside the still form. With an oath, Colbert jerked her to her feet and shook her violently.

"You listen to me. If he'd minded his own business he'd be alive now. Another second and he'd had that knife in my ribs. This puts a new face on the matter. You've got to throw in with me now—throw in with me, heart and soul!"

He paused, twisting her arm cruelly, and jamming her against the wall.

"You'll keep your mouth shut, or if you do open it you'll say what I tell you to say—do you hear? You'll marry me—then you can't testify against me—or else, by God, I'll put you where he is! I'll be damned if I'll swing for killing an Injun!"

"Marry you?" asked the girl in a dull voice. And again, "Marry you?"

The hazel eyes looking calmly into his own steadied Colbert. He released her arm and spoke hurriedly:

"Yes, beautiful one, marry me. Why not? With the old man's mine we will be sitting on top of the world. I'm sorry I—I used violence. I was excited. Things happened—suddenly. And, seeing you there on the floor beside that damned Injun, it made me see red."

She slowly stepped away from the wall. Her eyes wandered about the little room. Colbert noted that they came to rest upon the body of the Indian, but did not note that their glance had registered the exact position of the rifle that stood loaded in its corner.

"But what about Johnny Big Fish?"

A short, dry laugh greeted the words.

"There's the river. The hot weather and the fish will take care of him. Come take me to your father's shaft."

"Shaft?"

The hazel eyes held a peculiar vacant expression, and the voice sounded listless, as though the recently enacted tragedy had dulled the girl's sensibilities.

"Yes, yes! The shaft, or tunnel, or drift, or whatever he calls the hole that he takes his gold from."

"But," she said, in the same listless tone, "we can not leave the cabin like this." Her eyes roved from the body of the Indian to the overturned table and the dishes that littered the floor.

Colbert agreed with alacrity.

"No, of course not! Here, I'll right the table, and then we can carry him down to the river."

Annette's heart sank. She had little time to think. Already the man was stooping over the table. It was now, or never—and the rifle halfway across the room. Almost at a bound she reached it, grasped it, drew back the hammer. Then Colbert was upon her with a snarl. The rifle was sent spinning from her grasp, and she was hurled backward, staggering until the edge of the bunk, catching her behind the knees, tripped her. There was a blinding flash as her head struck the wall. The room roared with a deafening report, and—oblivion . . .

CHAPTER XII

SHOTS

BRIAN O'NEILL opened his eyes and for some moments lay in that delicious borderland that is neither sleep nor wakefulness. Beneath the interlaced spruce boughs daylight was drab. It might have been noon, or twilight. Somewhere a woodpecker was tapping persistently but intermittently as it flitted from tree to tree. A sapsucker industriously explored a trunk within ten feet of Brian's head, and a red squirrel scolded noisily with ludicrous quirks of its arched tail. Familiar sounds—these. No other sound came to his ears, and a trifle grimly, he smiled.

He gathered his blankets and made his way to the point where he and Annette had landed late in the evening. The canoe was gone, and with it the girl and her duffle. His own pack lay where he had left it, and beside the dead ashes of the little fire lay the unwashed dishes of the evening meal.

Brian stripped off his clothing and plunged into the lake. Emerging presently, every fiber a-tingle, he dressed and ate his breakfast.

"I knew she'd go back," he breathed exultantly. "She is like her father. Old Jovin was conscious when I dug that bullet out. Now I'll go and get her!"

He washed and cached the dishes, and such of his outfit as he would not need and, slipping the light pack on to his shoulders, struck out along the beach.

It was no easy journey that confronted Brian O'Neill. For every mile of sand or gravel, there were other miles of muck where the lake bordered upon swamps, and he was forced to wallow, sometimes waist deep between submerged trunks and the roots of trees. At times he left the beach and for miles followed the ridges, but the general trend of the ridges was transverse to his course.

He camped that night upon a high hill from the apex of which he was able to pick up with his glass the tree he had lobbed on the ridge near the mouth of the river. He estimated he had completed half the journey.

But half a journey in distance may not be half a journey in time, when traveling afoot in the northland. By noon Brian had left the ridges behind and found himself confronted by a broad muskeg whose surface presented not even the precarious footing of a quaking bog, and whose depths were illimitable muck. He thought of rafting along the shore; but with only a belt ax for a tool and green spruce for material, the task seemed hopeless. Following the ill defined margin of the muskeg was worse, even, than following the shore of the lake. Evening found him miles back from the lake, but with the muskeg behind him. As it narrowed he crossed on quaking bog, swam a river and found himself again among ridges.

In the morning he ate the last of his grub and, taking his bearings, struck a course that should bring him out on the river at no great distance from the cabin of Jovin Beauleau. Toward noon the roar of the waterfall told him he was nearing the river, and a short time later he came out upon the foot trail that led to the cabin.

"Wonder what she'll be doing?" he muttered with a grin. "She ought to know I'd come back, but she wouldn't be expecting me till tomorrow. I've made good time."

A HUNDRED yards from the little clearing he stopped dead in his tracks. Two shots, sounding almost as one, stabbed the air. By no possible chance could it have been the voice of the old single shot rifle that was the only firearm possessed by Jovin Beauleau. With his heart in his throat, Brian leaped forward. At the edge of the clearing he paused. No one was in sight. From the cabin, thirty feet distant, came the sound of a voice, the voice of a man. Silent as a shadow, Brian crossed the clearing and took a position close beside the single window. He wanted to look in, but dared not.

"I'll be damned if I'll swing for killing

an Injun," the voice was saying—and then the voice of Annette—

"Marry you?"

Who was this man? Why was he here? And what was this talk of marrying? Brian's first impulse was to dash around the corner of the cabin and confront the two. But certainly there had been nothing of excitement in the voice of the girl when she had repeated the two words—"Marry you?"

Nor was there hint of excitement in the voice of the man whose tone had become apologetic, almost caressing in its suave smoothness:

" . . . things happened suddenly . . . seeing you there on the floor beside that damned Injun, it made me see red . . ."

There was the sound of movement within the cabin, and the voice of the girl:

"But what about Johnny Big Fish?"

Then the nasty, rasping laugh:

"There's the river. The hot weather and the fish will take care of him."

So there was an Indian on the floor—a dead Indian—and that Indian was Johnny Big Fish. That would explain the shots. Brian knew Johnny Big Fish, rather liked him. Who was this man who was trying to persuade Annette to marry him, and why was Johnny Big Fish lying dead on the floor?

The voices were speaking again, but Brian could not catch the words. Was it possible that, despite her avowal of love for him, there was another? True, she had told him later that she hated him. Was it to meet this man she had returned to the cabin? Was he a fool?

Sudden commotion sounded from within the room, a beast-like snarl from the throat of the man, the crash with which the rifle ricocheted from the wall to the floor . . .

Brian reached the doorway in time to see Annette stagger backward and crash upon the bunk. With rifle at cock, he leaped across the sprawling form of the Indian, just as Colbert whirled and reached for his automatic.

There was a loud explosion as Brian fired from the hip.

The hand never reached the holster. Colbert straightened and stood for a moment staring straight into Brian's face, a look of bewilderment, of puzzled surprise in the eyes that stared out from beneath the beetling black brows. Then a torrent of red blood gushed from between the parted lips, and the man crashed forward upon his face and lay very still.

For a moment Brian stood, his eyes taking in each detail of the scene—the two forms sprawled head to head upon the floor, the overturned table, the unconscious form of the girl on the bunk. Crossing the room, he ascertained that she was breathing regularly. The blue lump rapidly rising on her temple just at the edge of the hair accounted for her condition. His first impulse was to bring her to, and his eye sought the water pail on the wash bench beside the door. Instead, he arranged her into a comfortable position and, laying aside his rifle, proceeded methodically to set the cabin in order.

Dragging the two bodies from the room, he righted the table, picked up the scattered dishes and washed the blood from the floor. Going to the river for a fresh pail of water, his eye caught the flutter of cloth where a garment whipped in the wind. It was his own shirt, the shirt that Annette had snatched from his hand. It had been stiff with sweat and dried blood then; it was clean now. When he returned to the cabin he placed it in the very bottom of his pack sack. Then, as he had done once before, he began to pack Annette's belongings into her two pack sacks.

When he had finished he stepped to the bunk. The girl lay as he had left her, eyes closed and face turned partly to the wall. A sudden tightening of the muscles told Brian that she had regained consciousness.

"Annette," he said.

The eyes opened with a jerk, and for a moment the girl stared up at him, a look of utter bewilderment in her face.

"Brian," she murmured. "Brian O'Neill."

"Yes."

She passed her hand across her brow.

"But—oh, was it all a dream? I thought —there was a man, a terrible man— and Johnny Big Fish lying dead on the floor."

"No, it wasn't a dream. There was a man. And Johnny Big Fish is dead. So is the other. If you feel able to travel we will go now."

"I have been lying here, afraid to open my eyes. I thought it was—that other man."

"He's dead," repeated Brian bluntly. "I shot him."

She sat up, resting for a moment on the edge of the bunk as her eyes took in the details of the room. Everything in order, her two pack sacks packed for the trail.

"Let's go," she said simply. "You were right. I can not stay here alone." At the door she started back at sight of the two bodies. "But what about— these?"

"We'll leave them where they are," answered Brian. "The police will want to look into this."

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE MISSION OF FATHER GIROUX

THAT evening at the camp site from which Annette had turned back she told of the visit of Colbert and of the killing of Johnny Big Fish.

"This Colbert was a bad man," she concluded. "I am glad that he is dead. I would have killed him myself, but he knocked the rifle from my hands. And then I heard your voice and I opened my eyes and you were there. Why did you come back?"

"You know why I came back," Brian answered gravely. "It is because I love you. I could not leave you there—and you know, now, that I am right. Someday I will marry you, and—"

Impulsively the girl leaned toward him and placed her hand upon his knee.

"Marry me now, Brian—as soon as we get to the mission. We will go back to the cabin and hunt for my father's gold."

Steeling himself against the appeal of her hazel eyes, he slowly shook his head.

"No, not now. I have much to learn. You can stay at the mission."

"Will you be at the mission too? Is it at the mission that you will study?"

"No," said Brian. "It is of things they do not teach at the mission that I want to learn. I know a man—Seth Adams, who is chief of the Geological Survey of Canada. He will be upon the rivers, and he has promised to give me a job. From him I can learn much."

"I will never marry you!" cried the girl. "I do not love you! I hate you! And I will not stay at the mission!"

"We will talk it over with Father Giroux," answered Brian quietly.

And, as he had done upon that other occasion, he picked up his blankets and disappeared into the spruce.

Adverse winds on Lake Athabasca prolonged the journey to six days. It was a journey of awkward silence, punctuated only by the most necessary conversation.

At Fort Chipewyan Brian notified Leith of the death of Jovin Beauleau. "I brought his daughter out with me," he explained. "She said her father always received money from you."

The old Scot combed at his red beard with his fingers.

"Aye. Twice each year the money comes, a matter o' five hundred dollars. 'Tis here the noo. I be'n expectin' him. So, he's gone, eh? Too bad, too bad. I liked him fine, fer all his hare brained huntin' fer gold. An' so the lass is left alone. I mind his wife died three or four year agone. Will she be goin' outside?"

"No," answered Brian. "I'm taking her down to Father Giroux's. Sometime I'm going to marry her."

The heavy hand of the old man rested upon Brian's shoulder.

"Weel spoken, laddie. An' noo ye'll be huntin' a job, a post to run, or what not? 'Tis glad I am to see ye settle doon."

"Where's Seth Adams? He promised to give me a job."

"He's gone upriver. He'll be back in a month wi' his crew. But why don't ye ask fer a post? 'Tis a better job fer a family mon than runnin' hither an yon, crackin' off pieces o' rock an' mappin' rivers."

"I'd rather map a river that had never been mapped before than run the best post the Company's got." Brian smiled.

"Losh, lad. Ye've an itchin' foot! But wheer's the lass? I must tell her aboot the money. I canna' turn it over to her till the public administrator gives me leave."

"She stopped to talk with Amos Clawhammer's wife. I'll send her up. Where is this public administrator? I suppose we'd better make a report to him."

"Report it to the police. Ye'll find Sam Crane down to Father Giroux's if ye don't meet him comin' back doonriver. He passed yesterday wi' a couple o' Injun kids he was takin' doon to the school."

It was with a heavy heart that Annette followed Brian up the steep bank and along the footpath that led from the landing to the neat, white painted cottage that was the home of Father Giroux. To the left the mission building with its new dormitory wing stood out bravely against its background of spruce, while to the right the cross tipped spire of the little chapel rose from a grove of poplars and birches. It was all so strange, so new, so different from the little cabin on the bank of the unmapped river.

Then like the shadow of a summer cloud, the heaviness vanished as the door of the screened porch opened and a tall man stepped out to greet them, his long silvery hair gleaming in sharp contrast to his somber robe. Never had the girl seen eyes so kindly, so filled with benign understanding, yet eyes that seemed fairly to twinkle with the very joy of living. He advanced, extending a hand to each.

"Welcome, my children—and shame on you, Brian O'Neill, for neglecting an old man! I heard you had passed down the river."

BRIAN passed the rebuke with a smile.

"Father Giroux, this is Annette Beauleau—"

"Beauleau? The daughter of Jovin Beauleau, who lives somewhere to the northward of the lake? I am delighted to meet you, my daughter. Twice I have met your father at Fort Chipewyan. A delightful man, and an honest agnostic. It is my loss that I do not know him better."

"He is dead," answered the girl simply. "He shot himself by accident. Brian came along soon after. We did everything we could, but it was no use."

"God's will, my daughter. The time will come to each of us when we must pass beyond."

"She has no place to go, Father. I brought her here."

"You did well." He turned to the girl. "You will be welcome as long as you care to stay, my daughter. It is a privilege to be allowed to minister to the ills of the spirit, as well as to those of the flesh. You must be tired. I will call Sister Agatha."

He clapped his hands sharply, and half a dozen Indian boys who had been playing ball came running to him.

"You, Peter, go fetch Sister Agatha. And the rest of you run down and pack the duffle from the canoe."

When Annette had disappeared with Sister Agatha, Brian followed Father Giroux to the porch where Inspector Crane sat smoking his pipe.

"Hello, Brian," greeted the officer. "You youngsters are the lucky dogs. Who's the lady?"

"Annette Beauleau. Her father was Jovin Beauleau. Lived down north of the lake on a river."

"I know him—prospector. Lives on some kind of a remittance that Leith turns over to him." The inspector paused. "What's the matter? Wouldn't he come up for the weddin'? Or is he campin' on your trail with a shotgun? If any young cub stole as good a lookin' girl from me, I'd give him both barrels an' the ramrod!"

Brian smiled into the eyes of the veteran officer whom he had known ever since he could remember.

"There will be no wedding—at least, not for a long time. Jovin Beauleau is dead, and Annette hates me because I wouldn't let her stay on at the cabin."

"Hate, or not, you done right to fetch her out, son. You say Beauleau's dead. Better give me the facts so I can report it. The public administrator will find out where his remittance comes from and authorize me to turn it over to the heirs. She's the only one?"

"Yes, an only child. Her mother died three years ago, and from what she's told me I don't think he'd have wanted any of his other relatives to share it with her. It's quite a long story, and when you've heard it, I think maybe you'll be wanting to go down to the cabin with me and kind of look things over."

The note of gravity in the young man's tone was not lost upon the veteran officer, nor upon the good Father Giroux who stood holding a match to the bowl of his long stemmed pipe.

The three seated themselves, Brian between the two older men, and for some moments he sat, seemingly at a loss to begin.

"Think you've turned up somethin', eh?" encouraged the inspector. "It wouldn't be surprisin', seein' the territory you cover. What was you doin' in north of the lake?"

BRIAN began with his meeting with Seth Adams at Chipewyan, and step by step he told of his attempt to map the lake; of his answering the girl's signal smoke; of finding Beauleau mortally wounded; of his return to the big lake for supplies; of the operation on and the death of Beauleau. He told of Annette's escape and return to the cabin; of his own pursuit of her; and of hearing the shots that had killed Johnny Big Fish, and the voices in the cabin; of the attack on the girl, and of dashing to the door to find the body of Johnny Big Fish sprawled on the floor; and of his shooting of Colbert. He spoke clearly and convincingly, and when he had finished, it was several moments before the voice of the old inspector broke the silence.

"Colbert, eh? So Thibaut Colbert's got his at last? Well—it's be'n a long time comin'."

"You knew him, this Colbert?" asked Brian.

"If it's the one I think it is, I know him—six one, or two; bushy brows, an' shifty eyes that glitter like a snake's."

Brian nodded.

"That's the man. But I never saw him before."

"This is the first time he's showed up on the rivers. He's a crook, but we've never be'n able to convict him. Promoted two, three fake minin' schemes, an' five, six years ago he was mixed up in a fake colonization proposition down in Saskatchewan. We nearly got him that time—murder an' robbery. Couple of Austrians drew all their money out of the bank to make land payments and were never seen alive again. If he's dead it's good riddance. I'll get the girl's story an' we'll be pullin' out in the mornin', the quicker the better, what with the hot weather an' all. I want to look the bodies over, an' then we'll bury 'em."

After supper, while the inspector talked to Annette, Brian and Father Giroux strolled down to the landing.

"What will you do, my son, when you and Sam Crane have finished your unpleasant task? Keep on exploring nameless rivers?"

"Not now, Father. What's the use of exploring a river if you don't know enough to map it? I never realized how little I knew till I tried to map that lake. That set me thinking, and I know that there are a thousand things I ought to know, and don't, about rocks, and—oh, about most everything, for that matter."

The kindly old eyes were beaming.

"But where is the lad that stood almost on this spot six months ago and scoffed at education, protesting that book learning was of no use to a man who always expected to live in the North?"

"I was a fool, Father. I thought I knew the North."

The old man sighed.

"I have lived in the North more than forty years, my son, and I do not know the North. Will you be coming back to me here at the mission?"

"No. I think I'll throw in with Seth Adams. He offered me a job, and he knows the things I want to learn, the things I am interested in—geology and botany and surveying and the making of maps. I do not care for history and philosophy and the affairs of the world at large. The North is my country, and I want to know it." He paused, and then added, "I'd like to know it better than any one ever knew it."

"A laudable ambition, my son—and who knows but what it will be fulfilled? You are young, and better fitted than any one I know to accomplish just that. But it will mean hard work and years of study, both in school and in the field. In selecting Seth Adams as your mentor you have chosen wisely—a fine man, and a scientist of outstanding ability. I am glad you have come to a purpose. It has grieved me to think of you merely as an aimless wanderer."

"About the girl, Annette," Brian asked awkwardly. "Can she stay on with you here at the mission?"

"As long as she chooses."

"Thank you, Father. I won't forget," said the younger man simply.

And as the sun sank behind the spruces of the opposite bank, the two turned and climbed the path that led up from the river.

CHAPTER XIV

INSPECTOR CRANE ADVISES

FIVE days later Brian stood beside Inspector Crane and viewed the two bodies that lay side by side in the dooryard of the little cabin.

"It's him, all right," said the inspector. "The boys outside will be glad to charge him off the books. An' now suppose you show me jest how it happened."

He listened intently as Brian re-enacted the scene, his keen eyes taking in the corroborative details of the tracks of Brian's pacs where he had listened beside the window, and the position of the girl's rifle that lay cocked where it had fallen.

"I dragged out the dead men because I didn't know how long it would be before some one would come, and I didn't want to spoil the cabin."

"You done right. Your story checks with the girl's. It's plain as the nose on your face what come off here. It's too bad Johnny Big Fish had to go. He was a good Injun. You got here jest in time, son. He'd have—have broke her, or killed her to save his own neck." He prodded the body of Colbert with his toe. "A damn' scoundrel like him, a man could almost wish he'd have died slow!"

The remainder of the day was spent in listing the effects taken from the pockets of the dead men, in burying them, and in taking inventory, for the public administrator, of the property of Jovin Beauleau.

In the evening the two sat with their backs against banksian boles at the edge of the cliff and smoked their pipes.

"Why don't you come into the police, Brian?" asked the old inspector, abruptly. "No one knows the river country better than you do. You savvy to do the right thing at the right time. An' when it comes to packin', or handlin' dogs, or canoes—I'm damned if I see yet how you come down through those rapids an' over the falls!"

"That was mostly luck."

"A lot of luck, too, but the luckiest man in the world, unless he'd be'n born in a canoe, you might say, couldn't have run those rapids an' be'n right side up when he hit the falls. The luck of it was in the girl's bein' where she was when you went over. A fine girl, that one. She sure spoke a piece about you."

"She hates me," answered Brian, his eyes on the far hills. "You can't blame her. I made her do what she didn't want to do."

The inspector grinned at the bronzed profile.

"So she says," he remarked dryly. "But how about joinin' the police?"

"No," Brian answered. "Seth Adams has promised me a job with the Geological Survey. You say I know the river country. The fact is I don't know it at all. There's a thousand things I don't know, but I will know, some day."

"Hell!" exploded the inspector in disgust, and launched at length on to his pet aversion. "I've seen 'em work, was detailed with 'em one year! Fifteen, sixteen of 'em, seinin' minnows, countin' the scales on white fish to find out how old they was! Who gives a damn how old a fish is, so he's big enough to eat? Who gives a damn how many quills a porcupine's got, or what time o' year a pike's teeth come loose? An' who gives a damn whether some little plant you see is a bohunkus gazookus, or a rinopinkus hilarium, an' how far north it grows, or don't grow, an' why? There ain't a plant, nor animal, nor fish, nor tree but what they call it out of its right name. It's like listenin' to a bunch of Dokhobors. Take that tree over there—you an' me know damn' well it's a spruce, but it ain't, accordin' to them. It's a *picea canadensis;* I remembered that one. An' when they ain't inventin' nicknames for everything they see, they're off peckin' at rocks, or clawin' in the mud, or countin' the bugs in a bird's craw. I'm askin' you, who gives a damn if a woodpecker eats pinchbugs, an' how many he eats to a meal? Or if a pelican swallers a fish head first, or hind end first? They call it science; an' if that's the kind of stuff you want to know, go to it!

"They can tell you how far a snail can walk backwards on the third of July in latitude 58° 21′ an' longitude 110° at an altitude of two thousand one hundred an' forty-seven feet with the thermometer at 59° above zero an' a humidity of 76 an' the barometer at 29.2, allowin' for a compass variation of 14°, if it's partly cloudy, an' the moon's in the third quarter—Any one of 'em can tell you all that without battin' an eye, but I'll be damned if more'n half of 'em can go to the spring for a pail of water an' get back without a policeman! I had my bellyful of wet nursin' 'em! This Adams is all right, but the crew he trains with! They can tell how many nits a louse lays, an' how long it takes 'em to hatch—but they scratch all summer 'cause they don't know enough to boil their shirt when they get lousy!

"They can pickle a straddle bug in alcohol, an' tell you the name of his grandmother, but they couldn't fry 'em a meal of victuals if they was starvin'. It's understandin' *people*, an' knowin' how to get around through a country, that counts—not knowin' how many hairs a spider's got on his right hind ankle. I'd rather put in a month runnin' down a good hooch runner, than ten minutes figurin' why a deer's got horns instead of wings, an' why a muskrat's got neither one.

"I heard 'em argue half the night about the family history of a chunk of shell one of 'em split out of a rock that had laid there a couple of million years or so, an' a storm come up, an' they all went in the tent an' left their blankets layin' beside the fire—"

"And you had to carry the blankets in?" chuckled Brian, who had enjoyed the tirade immensely.

"Not by a damn' sight, I didn't! I laid there in my sleepin' bag an' snickered, an' by an' by when they'd got to where they wasn't no more'n a hundred thousand years apart on the age of the shell, they got sleepy—an' was surprised as hell to find out that rain would wet blankets. Next day I did take pity on 'em an' dried their blankets, or they'd have be'n wet yet. That's what you're goin' to be up against, son; an' I hate to see a good man wasted on an outfit like that."

"But, you say yourself, Adams is different. And a man don't have to forget what he knows because he learns something else. They do a lot of good mapping the country and finding all about the mineral wealth and the timber—"

"Mineral wealth an' timber—hell! They don't change nothin', do they? It would be there jest the same without 'em, wouldn't it? The prospectors would find

the mineral wealth, an' any one that comes along can find the timber. The mappin' is all right. That's good practical stuff that any one can see the need for. 'Course, they ain't always accurate till they're checked up, but at that, they do a mighty good job. If the Government would make 'em put in all their time at that, an' maybe note down the kind of game, an' fish an' timber, an' whether it was scarce or plenty, I'd be for 'em, you bet. Instead of which they waste most of their time countin' the ridges on fish scales through a microscope, or tryin' to figure which end of an owl the hoot comes out of."

"All that knowledge is valuable, though," grinned Brian. "I never realized it till lately. Take that ridge over there—wouldn't you like to know why part of it is red and part gray? And why the rocks are tilted and what formed them, and when?"

INSPECTOR CRANE interrupted with a snort.

"Huh! If that ridge laid between me an' where I was goin', all I'd want to know about it is how steep it is an' how high! If it didn't lay in my road, I wouldn't even want to know that much. What the hell do I care what color they are? A red rock ain't any easier to climb over than a gray one, unless it's littler. An' knowin' what put 'em there, an' when, an' why, ain't goin' to flatten 'em down none. Studyin' folks is what counts—not rocks, an' birds, an' doodle bugs.

"But you go right ahead. I wouldn't say a word that would influence a man's decision. Learn all you can in the next five, ten years, an' when you're right sure of yourself, so you won't make no mistake about it, jest stop in to Fort Smith an' slip me the tip on how many bones in a chickadee's ear—if any. Only, you won't call it a chickadee by that time—but if you'll point at the bird, an' say the name right slow, with accents on the syllables, I'll maybe get what you're drivin' at. Who knows but what that bit of information stored away for future use might help me run down a murderer or save a bunch of starvin' Injuns?"

Brian laughed.

"Thanks for the encouragement, Inspector. If I don't like my job after I get started, maybe I'll quit and join the Mounted."

"Oh, you'll like it, all right," grinned the inspector. "Jest think what it would mean to be able to tell, offhand, how old a wood tick is before he loses his baby teeth."

"What do you know about gold?" asked Brian.

"What do I know about it? Why, not much, except it's a good thing to have plenty of. I ain't speakin' from experience, though. 'Gold's where you find it,' the sayin' is. Why?"

"I was just wondering," answered Brian, his eyes on the river. "Before Beauleau died he tried to tell Annette something about gold. He could hardly talk, and before she could bring a pencil and paper, he was gone. He said she must record it, but when I asked her where it was, she said she did not know. She said her father had told her he had found gold, and he evidently wrote his sister about it, because Colbert told Annette that Beauleau's sister had sent him up to try and beat her brother out of his gold."

"She'd ought to have her neck wrung, settin' a man like him against her own brother. Seems to me I've heard Colbert comes of a good family somewheres back East. If he did, he was a black sheep, all right—damn' black! And this here woman—Beauleau's sister—if she thinks he found gold she ain't goin' to let this killin' stop her. I'm bettin' we ain't heard the last of this yet."

"I'm wondering whether Beauleau really did find gold."

"He never showed none, did he?"

"No. Annette told me she never saw any. He may have been a little touched in the head and just imagined he had found it."

"Might have be'n," agreed the police-

man. "A lot of old prospectors gets that way. I've be'n on the rivers a long time, now, an' I never saw any gold taken out anywhere, except a little now an' then that some one pans out of a bar somewheres—but not enough to cut any figure. I never heard of any one even makin' wages at it. But you never can tell. Look at the Yukon. It wasn't no great shakes till Carmack made his big strike under the birch tree on Rabbit Crick. Gold's where you find it, an' I suppose it could be found around here as well as anywheres. Are you figurin' on turnin' prospector?" twitted the inspector. "An', if so, how about that chickadee's ear?"

"Oh, I'll tell you all about the chickadee's ear sometime," Brian promised. "Adams won't be back with his crew for three weeks or more, and I think I'll just camp here and prospect till he comes. If Beauleau really did find gold, Annette ought to have it. I've got a pan in my outfit, always carry it, and I've panned out a few ounces here and there, but, as you said, I never made wages at it. I'll pan some of the bars on the river and the creeks. Might as well put in my time here as hanging around the fort or the mission."

Inspector Crane grinned.

"If I was a young buck, I'd kind of vote for the mission, myself. I didn't get my wife campin' in no graveyard pannin' for gold; nor neither by countin' the feathers in a pelican's tail. No, sir! Every minute I was off duty I was campin' right on her old man's stoop pesterin' her until she give in."

"Maybe she didn't hate you to start with."

"Huh! It ain't how they start; it's how they finish that counts, son. A woman that can't hate can't love, neither. But you jest go ahead, an' keep away from her as much as you can, an' every couple of years or so, jest slip around an' tell her how many legs a caterpillar's got, or why birds don't fly backward, an' you'll bring her around all right. She'll be crazy about you—they sure do admire for a man to know those things."

"But, if I could find her father's gold—"

"So much the worse for you. A rich girl's goin' to have a lot more fellows taggin' around after her than a poor one. Even if she is pretty as a million dollars' worth of calendars, with plenty money to buy clothes, she'll be prettier yet. An' you off somewheres countin' the spots on a loon's egg."

"Maybe you're right," replied Brian doggedly, as he recollected the words of the girl. "But I'm going to learn a lot more than I know now before I marry her."

"You will, all right—but you'll learn it from her, not from me, nor Seth Adams."

CHAPTER XV

THE NEW CHIEF PACKER

IN THE morning after Brian had signed statements regarding the deaths of Jovin Beauleau, Johnny Big Fish and Thibaut Colbert, Inspector Crane took his departure with a word of homely advice.

"She's a fine girl, one any man could be proud of. I saw that when I talked to her. This education thing is all right, if you're hell bent on it, but a damn' poor substitute for a good woman. I'd rather have my wife than be able to call every rock, an' tree, an' plant, an' bird, an' beast, an' bug in Canada by the longest name there is in the dictionary! So long."

"So long, Inspector. If you see Kelly tell him I've signed on with Seth Adams."

Methodically, diligently, Brian explored the bars along the rivers and traversed the courses of creeks, but at no place could he find evidence of any mining operation. In vain he searched for a hidden trail that would lead to some distant creek or river. If Jovin Beauleau had found gold he had succeeded in guarding his secret well.

Panning here and there on the bars and along the banks of the creeks showed a few colors, but nothing that would tempt a man to fill a second pan.

At the end of twenty days he gave it up and struck out for the rivers.

At Chipewyan he learned that Adams had not yet returned, so he went on up to the mission.

Annette greeted him from the top of the bank as he ascended the trail from the landing.

"I knew that was your canoe. I have been watching it for a long time. I know the way you handle your paddle."

The blood leaped in Brian's veins as he took her hand.

"How are you, Annette?" he asked. "How do you like it here?"

"It is a good place to be, Brian. They are so good to me—Sister Agatha and Father Giroux. And, Brian, they will not let me pay them any money! I am teaching the little ones French, and I help Sister Agatha with the history and geography. I think it is fine to be doing some good in the world."

"The value of an education," said Brian sagely. "It is what I told you back there at the cabin."

The hazel eyes sought his in a swift glance.

"But, Brian, you have given up the idea—you have come to me, here?"

"Given it up!" He smiled. "Why, I haven't started it! Seth Adams hasn't come downriver yet. I am going to wait for him here." He did not note that the fire had died from the hazel eyes, nor that the brown hand had withdrawn from his own. "He's due any day, now. I want you to meet him."

"I don't want to meet him!" she cried impetuously. "I hate him, and I hate you!"

And abruptly she turned and fled across the tiny plateau toward the dormitory, leaving Brian O'Neill staring after her in amazement.

On the screened veranda of the little cottage, Father Giroux greeted Brian warmly. The keen old eyes had taken in the little tableau, though the ears had caught nothing of the words.

"And, what do you think of our little Annette?" he asked. "She has proven an acquisition of value. I have not seen her like since Corporal Downey robbed us of our little Marie."

"She says she likes it here," answered Brian dully. "I think I do not know much about women."

The bright old eyes were twinkling.

"Son, the man who thinks he knows women is the man who rides to a fall."

Brian, whose eyes were upon the river, straightened in his chair.

"Have you a glass, Father?"

"On the wall, beside the first bookcase."

BRIAN fixed the glass upon two dark specks that had showed around the far bend of the river.

"It is Seth Adams," he said, after an extended scrutiny. "It is now that I begin my education."

The old priest leaned forward, and the thin, strong fingers gripped the bronzed hand.

"We are going to be proud of you, son—we, of the rivers."

Together the two walked down to the pier where they waited till the scows warped in to the landing. Adams greeted Brian warmly.

"Hello, young man! Did you map my lake?"

"I made a drawing of it. It isn't much good. Have you still got a job for me? You said—down at Chipewyan—"

"I'll find a place for you. Why do you want the job? As I remember, Leith told me you never worked unless you were broke."

"It isn't the wages I want," replied Brian seriously. "If you'll help me to know the things I want to know, I'll work for nothing."

His eyes on the two scows, Brian did not see the glance that passed between Adams and Father Giroux. Nor did he know that the geologist had stopped and conferred with the aged priest on his way upriver.

"It is the awakening," whispered Father Giroux, as Brian strode to the water's edge and, oblivious to the men who were picking their way across the planks that had been run ashore, stood eyeing the half dozen rivermen who were bailing the uppermost of the two scows.

"Who's boss?" he asked of a thick shouldered man who heaved a bucket of water outboard.

"Who want's to know?" asked a voice in his ear, and Brian turned to glance into the face of a blear eyed, burly individual who stood at his shoulder.

"Hello, Commer," he said. "Did you bring the outfit down the river?"

"That's me, O'Neill."

"All these people, and that stuff, in a scow leaking like that?"

"Who's damn' business is it if I did?"

"Mine—partly. I'm with the outfit from now on."

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" The man bristled threateningly.

"I'll tell you in a minute," answered Brian.

And, turning abruptly, he stepped to where Seth Adams and Father Giroux were standing, drinking in every word of the terse dialogue.

"What's my job, Mr. Adams?" he asked.

Taken aback by the sudden question, Adams stalled:

"Why—I—I haven't given the matter any thought. What would you like it to be?"

Brian indicated, with a jerk of the thumb, Commer, who had climbed atop the pieces amidships of the scow and was profanely urging haste in the matter of bailing.

"When did that scow start leaking? I can tell you. It was just after you shot the Cascade Rapids. And he passed Fort McMurray, and McKay, and half a dozen oil camps, and never pulled in to patch it. You're lucky to be here, the shape that scow is in. If Commer hadn't been drunk he'd never have ripped her bottom out at the fall. And, if he hadn't been drunk ever since, he'd have stopped and patched her up. You've got too many men and too much goods on that scow to take chances. I'd like to boss this outfit. I'm the last man in the world to try to get another man's job. Ask Father Giroux. But I can't stand by and see men's lives in danger. I hope to learn a lot of things from you. And you told me that day at Chipewyan that maybe you could learn something from me. Father Giroux knows scows, and he'll tell you the same as I that that scow has got no business on the river with a load in her till she gets some new planking."

Adams looked troubled.

"Is it really as bad as you say? The loss of that scow would have precluded any possibility of our carrying on our summer's work."

Father Giroux spoke.

"In that case, my dear Adams, I should say that the lad has proven his worth. The scow is unfit for service."

"You know the rivers?" asked Adams, turning to Brian.

Father Giroux answered for him.

"None better. I can vouch for his knowledge and for his efficiency."

"All right," said Adams. "You're hired as chief packer and guide of this outfit. And I don't mind saying that I feel vastly relieved. I don't like that man, Commer. But, he was the only available man at the Landing."

He motioned to Commer, who swaggered down the plank to the beach.

"D'ja want me?" he asked.

"Yes. I just wanted to tell you that from now on you'll take your orders from Mr. O'Neill."

"The hell I will!" cried the man truculently. "Ain't I boss of this outfit?"

"Not any more. You're discharged for inefficiency. I'll make out your voucher."

With a bellow of rage, the man whirled and aimed a blow at Brian's head that the younger man was barely able to dodge. Adams stepped forward, but Father Giroux laid a detaining hand on his arm, and with a slight jesture indicated the twenty packers and rivermen—Indians, halfbreeds and whites who had ceased operations to view the impending battle.

"Do not interfere," whispered the wise old priest hurriedly. "It is the way of the rivers. The lad must have his chance. If he expects to govern these, he must show his fitness to govern."

"But," objected Adams, "the man is twice his size!"

A slight smile twitched the aged lips, and Father Giroux shrugged.

"It is the way of the rivers," he repeated, and relapsed into silence.

COMMER, recovering his poise from a second ponderous blow that had failed to land, was charging in on his lighter antagonist, who had stepped to a level spot some six or eight feet nearer the river. Brian sidestepped the rush without apparent effort. Like a flash of light his right arm shot out, and a resounding open hand slap that reached the ears of the farthest onlooker landed full upon the big man's face, and at the same time the toe of his left pac caught the man full on the buttocks with a force that all but sent him into the river. Brian was smiling broadly.

It was a stroke of genius—this burlesquing the fight. A roar of delight, followed by guffaws of laughter, burst from the throats of the rivermen and packers. Staid scientists were laughing aloud.

Again Commer charged, and again that lightning-like slap spattered blood from the man's nose. This time Brian's foot was cleverly slipped between the man's feet, and he crashed heavily to the ground. Laughter ceased abruptly and cries of warning cut the air, as Commer struggled to his feet, a jagged rock fragment in each hand. But Brian had no need of warning. He had seen the man's move. One leap, and as Commer's arm drew back to hurl the rock, Brian struck twice—no flat hand slaps these, but good honest blows of doubled fists driven by muscles hard as steel and trained to do the bidding of an alert brain. One landed on the jaw, and the other in the middle of the thick paunch. The rocks clattered from the man's hands to the loose stones of the beach.

Commer stood very still, his eyes glassy, his mouth sagging open. Then the huge body weaved slightly as the knees sagged beneath it, and very abruptly, and very heavily, the man sat down among the rock fragments. Slowly, clumsily, as in a daze, a thick hand rose and brushed at the face as if to remove an obstruction from before the eyes. Thick fingers fumbled and prodded at the sagging jaw, and came to rest there, as if to prop the damaged member into place.

Then amid the renewed howls and shouts of derision from the rivermen, Commer began to cry. Loudly, he blubbered and squalled, while in English, French and jargon the delighted rivermen hurled jests and phrases of obscene contempt. Brian turned away in disgust and, stepping to the water's edge, addressed the men who were crowding the rails of the scows.

"I'm boss—Brian O'Neill. Any of Commer's friends that want to quit can quit now."

A big Frenchman grinned broadly, as his eyes swept his fellows.

"By goss, she ain' got no frien's. She wan beeg leetle puppy—she ain' even de dog. She cry lak de leetle girl wat burn de finger. By goss, I'm t'ink we lak we work for you."

"All right, then. Get to work now, all all of you, and unload that leaking scow. Careful with those pieces. Pile them out of the way and cover them with tarps. We've got to haul the scow out and get some planking into her."

As the men sprang to obey, Brian turned to Father Giroux.

"Got any planking here, Father? I won't know how much it will take till I've had a look at her bottom."

"There may be some. If not, you can rip some out. There are a few logs at the mill."

"How long will the repairs take?" asked Adams.

"Can't tell till I've looked her over. With good luck I'll have her on skids by suppertime. Ought to get her launched again by tomorrow noon. We'll run the sawmill tonight if we have to. I've got to rig a windlass—"

"There's a winch in the storehouse," said the priest.

"Good! That will save time." Brian turned to the big Frenchman who had

acted as spokesman. "Here, Frenchy, take a couple of men and cut about four good poles for skids and float them down here—and don't let 'em rot on the way!"

The big fellow grinned, and a moment later was moving rapidly up the shore with his axmen.

Brian turned to find himself confronted by the cook.

"Me—I'm got to git helper to git my stove ashore—my keetchin. De suppaire, she no good, she be late!"

"Right!" answered Brian, and told off a man.

As he started up the bank Adams stopped him.

"I'll introduce you to the others, now, the members of the party . . ."

Brian smiled.

"They'll have to wait," he said. "I've got to get up to the mill to see about that planking. And there's the winch to drag down and rig."

Adams nodded.

"You're right. You can meet them at supper."

A tall, thin man stepped up, a man who wore thick glasses and spoke disagreeably through his nose.

"Dr. Adams, is this young man, may I ask, to be the new chief packer?"

"He is. O'Neill, this is Professor Beggs, the entomologist of the expedition."

"Ah, yes, quite so," squeaked the professor. "And now, my good man, if we are to spend the night here, may I ask that you get the tents pitched?"

"What tents?" asked Brian, with a glance toward the cloudless sky.

"Why, the sleeping tents, to be sure. I feel drowsy and desire to take a nap. When will you have them ready?"

"The first rainy night."

"But," gasped the other, "you do not expect us to sleep out like beasts . . ."

"No. Like men," answered Brian curtly, and strode up the trail, leaving Professor Beggs goggling through his thick glasses.

CHAPTER XVI

COMMER STRIKES

THAT night, for the first time since leaving the Landing, there were no tents pitched. Nor did Brian meet the scientists of the party at supper. He was at the sawmill with a crew of rivermen, ripping out planking for the scow. And, as fast as it was ripped out, it was packed to the river where hammers and saws sounded until the belated darkness called a halt on the activity. At two o'clock in the morning they were at it again, and at ten the damaged scow was in the river, right and tight, with her cargo stowed.

It was Rawley, the cartographer, youngest member of the scientific party, who voiced the general sentiment of the survey. He it was who had stood close beside Seth Adams the better to see the fight, and had overheard Brian's terse reply to Professor Beggs.

"By golly," he confided, as he rejoined the group that had watched from a distance, "this chap's no roughneck. He floored old Buggs with his brain, as neatly as he did this Commer person with his fists! I'm for him. He knows his apples. We'd have been in a hell of a fix if that scow had sunk."

And Seth Adams himself, as he sat and smoked on the little veranda with Father Giroux and listened to the sound of the hammers:

"This young O'Neill— I rather hesitated at first on account of his youth, but it seems I've made no mistake."

"No mistake, I assure you," answered the aged priest, whose word was law upon the rivers. "I have known the lad since infancy. I have known his father, Kelly O'Neill, since I have been in the country. The Company never had a better man than Kelly O'Neill." The old man paused, and a touch of wistfulness crept into his voice, which Adams was quick to note.

"The lad talked to me here after you had gone upriver. All my life I have spent in trying to understand my people. Young Brian has interested me as few

have. He has a brain. Yet I have never been able to get close to him. He comes—and he goes. His attitude toward education has been one of tolerant cynicism. He is an apt student, but professes a contempt for what he chooses to call book learning. His interest seems to be all in roaming the country, in seeing things he has not seen before. Then—he met you. And in one short conversation you have captured that which I have never been able to capture—his imagination. Tell me how you do that, my friend? You, who care only for rocks, and for the prying into the secrets of God, how do you reach the heart of a man for whose heart I have been reaching for years, and have failed?"

Seth Adams frowned.

"And where would I have been, Father, had you not paved the way? It was you, and possibly his father, who awakened his intellect. Who else in the North would have been keen for mapping a lake? Who else would have given our short conversation a second thought? Brains travel in grooves, Father—his and mine in the same, maybe. I'll know by the end of the summer."

The old priest smiled as he puffed at his long stemmed pipe.

"It is thus with the world, with the humble, and I suppose with the great of the world—that which we strive for is that which we do not attain."

"Damned rot! Father Giroux, I've known you for a dozen years. I know something of your work on the rivers. I know what men like Old Man Downey and David Gaunt say about you. Your work will be felt for a thousand years in the North. Mine will be overridden by the next generation."

"I appreciate that from the lips of a man I can believe means it. More of condemnation than of praise comes to my lot. But I know what I know, and I do what I do."

"And you do a-plenty. Come, Father Giroux; have I got a scientist, or only a damned good packer?"

"You have a good packer. You also have a brain which only you have been able to appeal to. I leave the lad in good hands."

"He'll have his chance," said Adams; and to the sound of the tapping of hammers the two sought their beds.

JUST before the scows were cast off the following morning, the Hudson's Bay Company steamer, *Grahame*, nosed in at the landing on her way upriver and, being short handed, the captain was glad to hire Commer, who went aboard amid the hilarious jibes of the rivermen.

Later, as Brian paused to speak to the big Frenchman who manned the long steering sweep of the leading scow, the latter gave him a warning.

"Dat damn' good t'ing you look out for Commer. She ain't fergit. If you lick um good, she fergit dat. But, not w'en you mak' de fool. She got de bad eye. Mebbe-so, som'tam she keel you."

Brian laughed.

"Oh, Commer's harmless. He don't want any of my meat."

"*Oui*, but w'en she com' roun' dat bes' you keep de one eye in de back of de head."

At the mouth of the Athabasca the outfit tied up to await the return of the *Grahame*, which was to tow the scows across the lake to Fort Chipewyan where Adams had decided to establish a permanent camp.

It was during this week in which they awaited the return of the *Grahame* that a new world was opened to Brian O'Neill. The scientists were not idle. Each in his own province was busy collecting specimens, and the laboratory tent with its dissecting instruments, its miscroscopes and its chemicals proved a veritable wonder palace to the lad whose duties during the tie-up were almost negligible. No plant, or insect, or bird, or mammal, was too small, or too insignificant to come in for its share of meticulous observation.

Where, to Inspector Sam Crane, these investigations were the butt of ridicule, to Brian they were of absorbing interest. Early and late the lad worked, accom-

panying members into the field, or haunting the laboratory to watch with a consuming interest each move that was made.

So great was his zeal that even Old Buggs—as Professor Beggs was irreverently referred to by the younger members of the party—unbent and favored Brian with an illuminating, if somewhat abstruse, dissertation upon the life cycle of the *lepidoptera*.

One evening Seth Adams came upon the lad seated upon a rock, staring out over the lake.

"Well, have you decided which branch you want to devote your life to?" he asked with a smile.

"I'd like to know about them all," Brian answered.

"So would all of us. But, unfortunately, my boy, life is not long enough. If a man is going really to get anywhere, he must specialize."

"I'll take the rocks then," answered Brian unhesitatingly. "But I want to learn how to make maps."

"You'll learn that of necessity. Father Giroux tells me he has coached you through algebra, geometry and trigonometry. How would you like to go to college this fall?"

Light leaped into the younger man's eyes, and as quickly died.

"Not this fall," he answered heavily. "I have no money. But sometime I am going."

"I think I can manage that," said Seth Adams. "You are on my payroll at five dollars a day, and we will be out until October. Then, it so happens that I have a certain influence, here and there. Any recommendation of mine would be almost certain to be acted upon. If you care to go I think we can consider the matter settled."

Brian's voice was not quite steady as he answered.

"I'll go. And—sometime I'll pay you back."

"There'll be no paying back to do, son. Canada needs men like you, and she doesn't need them for guides and packers!"

A permanent camp was established just west of the Roman Catholic Mission at Fort Chipewyan and the outfit divided into two expeditionary forces, the one under Adams, to explore Lake Claire and the lower Peace River country for mineral; and the other, and larger party, under the cartographer, Rawley, to explore and map the Tazin Lake country, and report on the fauna and flora of the north shore.

Brian, with half a dozen canoemen and packers, accompanied the Adams expedition, and it was while with the kindly scientist in the field, but mostly during the long talks in the evenings, that he came to realize the enormity of the task that lay before him in the mastery of his chosen science.

Adams took delight in disclosing an illuminating glimpse here, a glimpse there, of what geology really meant in anything like a thorough understanding of the Northland; and, being that rarest of humans, a real scientist who could present his subject in terms of understanding and of interest to a layman, he impressed the lad—whetted his appetite without discouraging him.

AFTER a month in the field the outfit returned to the base camp where Brian spent the afternoon helping Adams in the labeling and boxing of specimens.

Toward evening, one day, a long whistle announced the arrival of the *Grahame* on a trip upriver, and after she had warped to, Brian strolled up to the Company post. He encountered Commer in the doorway, evidently a little the worse for liquor.

"How about givin' me a job?" asked the man thickly. "You took mine, an' it ain't no more'n right you give me one, even if it's only packin'."

"I thought you were on the *Grahame*."

"I am, but steamboatin's too damn' hard work."

"Packing is hard work too. We don't need any loafers."

"Is that so! I'll loaf you, you—" He

began to rip out a vile name, and Brian halted him.

"That will be about all, Commer," he said. "I can knock hell out of you with my two fists any time I try, and you know it. If you use anything else, well, I don't want to kill you. Just think it over."

Commer stepped into the trading room and, hearing footsteps, Brian turned to face Annette Beauleau. The girl noted the swift lighting of his eyes.

"Annette," he cried, "I didn't know you were here. You didn't get off the *Grahame*."

Neither noticed that Commer had halted out of sight just within the door.

"No," she answered. "Father Giroux and I have been staying at the mission here, waiting for the boat. We are going back on her. She leaves at daylight in the morning. We came here because there were some papers to be signed so I could get the money that Mr. Leith would have paid to my father. And I have it right here in my pocket—five hundred dollars—and now I have more than six hundred dollars, and that is a great deal of money. And twice each year I will get five hundred more, as my father used to do."

"That's fine! But what are you going to do with it all? You say they won't let you pay anything at the mission."

Impulsively the girl stepped closer.

"Do you know what I want to do with it? What I would like to do?"

"No."

"I would like to buy supplies with it. Then we could be married right here and go back to the cabin. Then, Brian, we could live—and you would never have to trap, or to work on the rivers. For I do love you—and I know that you love me—even if you do want an education. I do not want to go back to the mission. I want you. I have tried hard to hate you, but I can not, and when you are gone I am unhappy. It is my pride that hates, while my heart loves—"

Others were coming toward the trading room, from the camp, and from the *Grahame*, and Brian interrupted her.

"Wait, Annette. We can not talk here. I must get back, for there are boxes of things to go outside on the *Grahame*. Listen. As soon as it is dark I will meet you up on the point—and there we can talk."

She hesitated, then nodded assent.

"I will come. But I must not let Father Giroux know. He might be very angry. We sleep on the boat tonight, and when the light goes out in his little room I will come."

As the men approached she stepped into the trading room, and he hastened to the camp.

DARKNESS had settled before Brian quitted the camp and proceeded along the rocky beach toward the point beyond the extreme eastern edge of the little settlement. No light showed from the mission, the houses, the teepees of the Indians, or from the Hudson's Bay Company's buildings of squared logs that gleamed white in the starlight. He paused beside the *Grahame*, warped close against the bank, noted that her gangplank had not been pulled up and that lights showed dimly from two or three of the cabin windows. Then he passed on into the darkness toward the point, a quarter of a mile distant.

From his place of concealment among the boxes and bales of the forward deck, Commer scowled evilly as his hairy hand tightened its grip on a short section of iron pipe. With his other hand he reached for a bottle and rasped the raw liquor from his throat with a curse.

"He will take my job an' make a fool out of me, will he? An'—five, six hundred dollars—I'll git 'em both! She's good an' deep off'n them rocks, an' that old iron pulley lays right there handy. They won't neither one of 'em ever come up."

A half hour passed. The lights in the cabins were extinguished. Light footsteps sounded on the deck and, pausing for a moment at the head of the gangplank, Annette passed swiftly ashore. Gripping his piece of pipe and catching up

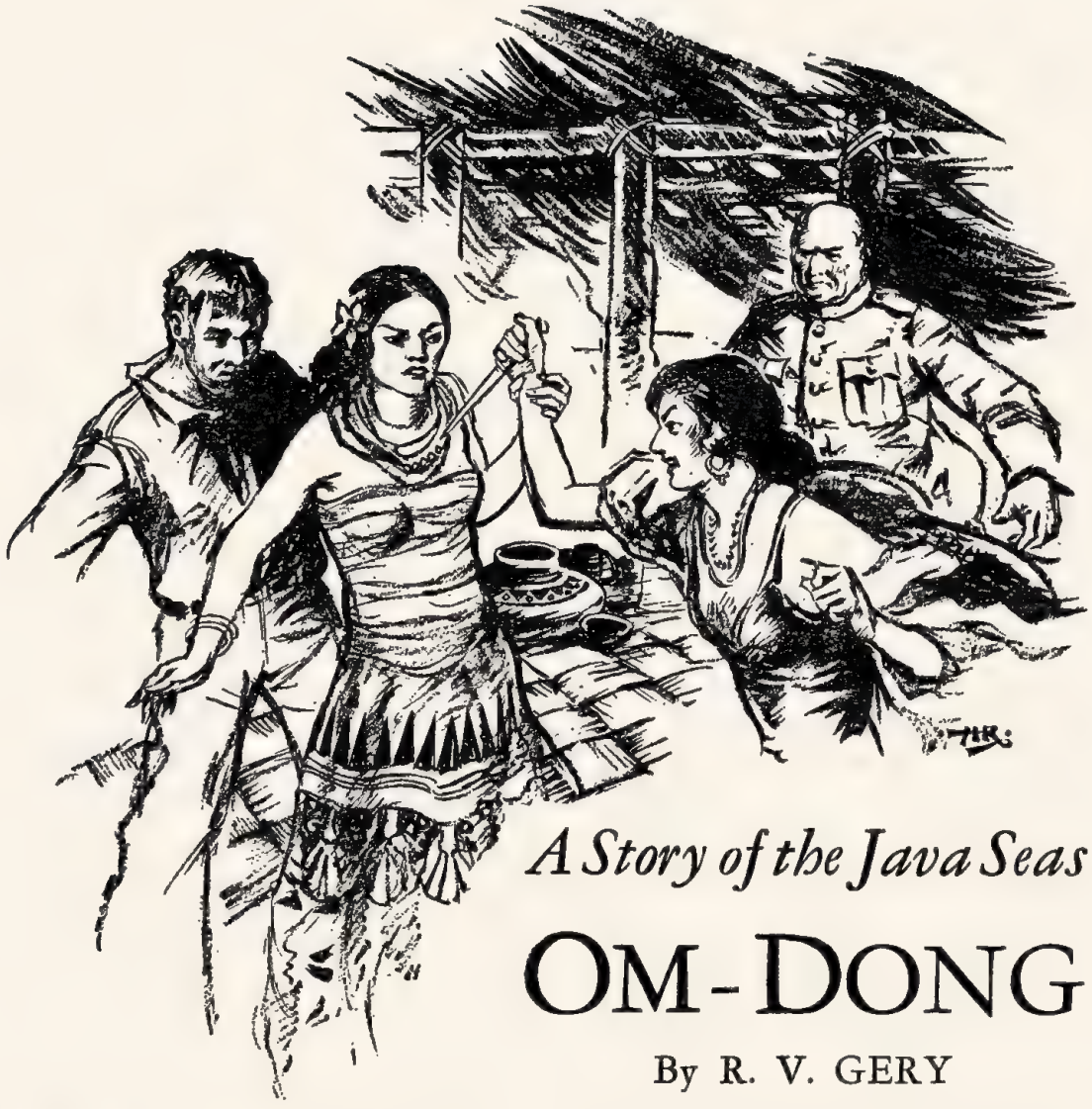
a length of light line, Commer followed.

The moment Commer stepped ashore, he realized he had made a mistake in removing his shoes. The rocks hurt his feet. By the thin light of the stars he could see the girl hurrying toward the trysting place, nearly a quarter of a mile away.

Stifling his curses, Commer redoubled his effort, for he was minded to deal with the girl swiftly and finally midway between the *Grahame* and the rocky point. Later he could deal with Brian who, he knew, would be unarmed and would make no outcry. But, try as he would, he could not gain on her. The beach rubble tore and bruised his feet, while she seemed to pass over it as swiftly and smoothly as though she walked a pavement. She had passed the midway point when fortune favored Commer. The loose rubble gave place to solid rock and, gripping his pipe, he ran noiselessly, rapidly closing the gap that separated him from his quarry. Ten yards, five, two—he raised the pipe for a crushing blow. Then his gods played him false. His eyes on Annette's head, he stepped into a narrow fissure and fell heavily forward; the iron pipe flying from his hand rang sharply on the hard rock at the feet of the girl, who turned with a sharp cry of terror as Commer scrambled, cursing, to his feet.

The next instant he was upon her. A scream was stifled as thick fingers closed with crushing force upon her throat.

TO BE CONTINUED



A Story of the Java Seas

OM-DONG

By R. V. GERY

MYNHEER CORNELIUS VAN TROMP, of the Dutch police in Sourabaya, is a cherubic, chubby little fellow with blue eyes whose placidity remains unaltered by the run of fantastic experiences common to policemen in the East. He is very Dutch, very sedate, very reflective; you can almost hear him counting ten; and he has, moreover, a pawky vein of humor, inherited, maybe, from that ancestor who flew the besom at his truck in token of a clean sweep of the Narrow Seas.

He is a friend of mine and, at suitably long distance, of Griggs as well. I believe, in his ruminative way, he looks on that disreputable little person in the light of a clinical case, a specimen too valuable to be carelessly handled, a kind of museum exhibit of toughness conferring distinction on his beat. Possibly this explains a certain leniency shown by the Dutch toward the various irregularities which have from time to time taken place in Griggs' frowsy little home. I am inclined to believe that their attitude in Sourabaya is that, while Griggs may be bad, the individuals removed by him are certainly a deal worse; consequently Van Tromp lets him alone; even considers him with a certain amused respect as an abater of nuis-

ances. A philosophic lot, these Dutch!

But things came to a head over Julie La Plante and her necklace. Griggs acquired the property by the simple process of killing Maxon, Julie's agent, with the possibly adequate excuse that Maxon was in the act of murdering her. Julie then made a well conceived attempt to recover the stones with the help of one Sawcroft, now at the bottom of a quicksand with a bullet in him; this failing, she turned to Van Tromp and his minions, which brings me to the afternoon when he came into the back veranda of Adolf's, shaken clean out of his usual stolidity.

He called for a long, powerful drink, swallowed it with a gasp of relief, and turned a comically perturbed eye at me.

"Almighty!" he exploded. "These women—they are the devil!"

I looked at him in some curiosity, for I had heard not a little of Cornelius and his conquests among the *mevrouws* of the colony; for all his placid demeanor the little fellow had a very distinct flair for the ample ladies of his country, and to hear him objurgating the sex was something new.

"What's the matter now?" I asked.

"Matter!" He grunted, irritably enough for him, and favored me with a hard stare. "Remember your so charming friend, Griggs—and a certain necklace?"

I felt a little uncomfortable. I know a great deal more of the doings of that drunken little reprobate than Cornelius does, of course, but there was never any telling what latest exploit might have seeped through to official ears; and even Dutch patience has a limit. I wondered whether the Sawcroft business had come to light, and if they were sounding a certain quicksand . . .

"She comes to my office," he went on, and I breathed freely again, "and *pfui!* she shouts at me all afternoon. I am to do this, and do that—me, Van Tromp—and do it in a hurry, moreover. Tell me, my friend, what is it that this Mynheer Griggs of yours has done last. Another little murder, eh?"

I am afraid I laughed.

"Who was it, Cornelius?" I asked. "Not our fair friend Julie?"

He nodded and swore a complicated Dutch oath.

"For three hours," he said, "I have been half afraid for my life. There was nothing too bad for me if I did not take action against this Mynheer Griggs of yours, and get her back her stones—at once! I am to be hurried—me!" He set his head on one side comically and scowled. "What in the devil's name has this Griggs been contriving now?"

I shook my head owlishly. Let Van Tromp find out for himself.

"Anyhow, I'm pretty sure Julie herself hasn't any more title to the stones than Griggs has," I said.

Cornelius waved a podgy hand.

"Title?" he inquired. "Nothing to me. But this *vrouw* claims your friend Griggs killed her agent, Max—Maxon—a-ha!—to steal the stones from her, and then also some other man. It is all very troublesome."

He swallowed the last of his drink and rose deliberately to his feet.

"What are you going to do, Cornelius?" I inquired.

"For peace I will do anything." He made a wry face. "These women are the devil, my friend, and a man must sometimes humor them."

TWO DAYS afterward I met Cornelius again in the street and inquired casually after Julie. He grinned contentedly.

"She is—what you say?—tickled pink with Cornelius just now; Schultz and De Groot went down the coast yesterday to look into things, and everything is correct, no?"

"Oh, perfectly," I said; there was an odd twinkle in Van Tromp's eye that promised developments. He took me by the arm.

"You are busy, yes?" He put a finger to the side of his plump nose. "Maybe too busy to go down and see—I am a little afraid of this Mynheer Griggs of yours, and De Groot and the other boy are good

boys, but almighty, not very wise . . ."

He winked portentously and fell into a Dutch silence, which makes the grave seem riotous. I went aboard the *Kittiwake* and had them get steam.

Griggs met me, cheerfully unclean as ever.

"Well," he said with a leer you might have hung your hat on, "you're a nice one, you are!"

"What is it now?"

"Sickin' them Dutchmen on to me down 'ere, them an' their narsty little inquisitive ways. It was you done it, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't," I said. "You've other friends in these parts, you know."

He grinned knowingly.

"Yus!" he said. "I might 'ave known it was 'er. She's a lovin' little party, ain't she?"

He walked up the path with me toward the house, thoughtfully silent; it seemed to me I had never seen him so egregiously sober, or so preoccupied.

"What's the matter?" I asked him. He shook his head. "Never you mind," he said. "Just a little idea of mine."

I was about to ask him for De Groot and Schultz, when we found them sitting on his crazy veranda, playing scat. Om-dong, as usual, was in evidence, with the necklace about her golden throat; she greeted me with a smile that showed her wonderful teeth, and set me a chair.

De Groot and Schultz had risen and were watching me. De Groot was a fat little baldish fellow with an innocent expression that would have passed him anywhere. Schultz, big, dark and saturnine, was a type of Hollander new to me. He frowned officially at Griggs.

"Who is this?" he jerked out, and I thought there was more than a trace of annoyance in his voice.

"Friend of mine." Griggs slumped himself down in his battered chair and winked microscopically at me. "And it ain't no manner of use pumpin' 'im, because 'e won't tell you nothin'," he added impudently. Schultz scowled.

"You would do well to be a little careful, my friend," he said with acidity. "Remember you are under suspicion."

Griggs opened his mouth in pretended terror and sat gaping at the constable.

"Gawd!" he remarked conversationally. "You don't say so! Anythink I says to be taken down an' used in evidence agin me, eh? Well, well, we lives an' learns, don't we?"

He turned over his shoulder to Om-dong.

"*Sharab do*, you little ha'porth o' trouble, let's 'ave a drop of tiddley, an' maybe—" he stared with infinite provocation at Schultz—"these 'ere gen'lemen—I won't say peelers—will join us."

There was everything in his voice not calculated to placate, and tension increased like a stretched violin string. Om-dong brought the drinks, served me, and then offered them to the two policemen.

Schultz took the rum, fingering the glass as if it contained poison. He drank a stiff jolt of it, seemed to make up his mind suddenly, and fumbled in his pocket.

"*Soh!*" he snapped out. "I am decided! You are arrest, Griggs—on suspicion of murder."

He jerked a revolver from his belt and covered the little man.

"Hold out your hands," he commanded malevolently. "De Groot, handcuff him!"

Griggs had his Winchester swung lazily across one knee, but he did not stir a finger. Instead, he said in the quietest of voices:

"All right, ducky. Come an' put 'em on."

De Groot got up.

"Here!" I cut in. "Isn't this a pretty irregular kind of proceeding? Where's your warrant, Schultz, anyway?"

THE BIG man turned to me and told me in Dutch, exceedingly acrimoniously, to mind my own business. As he did so the pistol muzzle deflected itself, casually enough, from Griggs' stomach.

He did not move, but continued to re-

gard Schultz with a level stare from his hot eyes. De Groot, the weaker nature, hesitated with the handcuffs; and before I could take the matter any further with Schultz, Griggs laughed aloud.

" 'Ow much did she pay you for this, mister?" he asked, a sneer twisting his unlovely mouth. "Go on; stick them irons on me if you want to; I ain't resistin' you, so you ain't got no excuse to pull nothin' on me. Like to, wouldn't yer? That's about what you an' she faked up, ain't it? You to try an' take me, an' me to put up a scrap, an' then we'd 'ave 'resistin' arrest', eh? Very pretty, Mister Bloomin' Dutchman, but it ain't workin', not with 'Enery Griggs! Clap 'em on—if you've any warrant, which you 'aven't!"

I most firmly believe that if I had not been present Schultz would have taken chances on shooting Griggs as he sat, and trusted to intimidating the weak De Groot into backing his story. As it was, he merely sat and glowered. Griggs turned to me.

"Pretty little game, that, eh?" he asked. "See 'im try to make me pull on 'im just now? That ain't no p'lice trick, I arsk you! What this swine wants is just an excuse to *maffish* me an' walk away with them stones for Julie. Put up that gun, yer silly *barnshoot!*" He turned to the man. "Nex' time you come tryin' these tricks on a man, you go to school a bit first—an' don't get a woman to tell you what to do!"

He rose to his feet and, with supreme insolence, walked away across the clearing without a backward look. I turned to the two policemen and told them one or two things that occurred to me by way of comment on the situation. De Groot grinned sheepishly and I acquitted him of any complicity with the scowling Schultz; then I followed Griggs across into the trees.

Ten yards inside their shade he met me, chuckling like a schoolboy, his rifle across his arm.

"See that?" he said. "That Julie ain't done with it yet, eh? An' there's more to come yet, or I'm a liar." He broke off and laughed again.

"Now," he went on, "if I'm not damn' well mistaken, there's liable to be proceedin's hereabouts shortly. That bird there ain't by no means finished yet, an' if he can't get them stones one way he will another.

"You might just observe I've left 'im alone awhile now, an' Om-dong's wearin' the necklace." He cocked a profligate eye at me. "You *imshi* off f'r a walk, now an', by the way," he added, "if you 'appened to see anythink that did 'appen, why, it might come in 'andy!" He snapped open the breech of his rifle.

Griggs had entertained me several times with graphic accounts of his little dallyings with murder, but this was the first time I had been, so to speak, in the front row of the stalls. I can not say I found the experience in any sense a pleasant one, but in view of what he said, I wandered off, keeping out of sight of the veranda, until I came to a spot from which I had a view of the clearing, with small chance of being seen myself. The afternoon was peaceful, and very hot; great insects buzzed and hummed about the glade, and from the cluster of huts twenty yards distant from Griggs' own ramshackle habitation came a gabble of hybrid Chinese. The two Dutchmen sat on the veranda still, and I could see Schultz arguing with De Groot.

By and by Om-dong came out of one of the huts and walked across to the house with her smooth, graceful step. I saw Schultz look at her and get up.

HE PLANTED himself straight in her path, and the yellow girl stopped and looked at him, evidently with hostility, for he said something or other, and reached for her. She dodged aside, and I could see the great stones glittering on her neck. Schultz made a grab and caught her by the shoulder.

I saw De Groot behind him jump to his feet and run forward, waving his hands, clearly in protest against so irregular a performance; then Schultz tore the necklace from the struggling, biting Om-dong,

and made a bolt for it across the clearing. Griggs' rifle cracked like a whip and the man dropped in a heap in his tracks, while De Groot stood, with his hands still in the air, looking down at him with his mouth open.

I ran out of the trees and met Griggs walking across the glade, his rifle under his arm; De Groot boggled at him, and the little man turned to me.

"You'll witness," he said, "that this feller attacked me wife, and—" he stooped and loosened the stones from Schultz's hand — "was escapin' with valuables. You'll also witness that I accused 'im of bein' paid by Julie La Plante to *maffish* me, an' 'e didn't deny it."

He looked down at the dead man.

"Now," he said, "let's get 'im out of the way!"

He nodded across to his little private burying ground behind the trees, and at that precise moment the Dutch gunboat *Amboyna* whistled as she rounded the point.

Van Tromp looked from Griggs to me and back again. What was left of Schultz lay on a bed inside the house, De Groot stood unimaginatively to attention, and I had just ended my version of the story. Griggs stood—it was entirely in character—with his rifle flung across an arm, and regarded the embodiment of law and order with a brassy stare. Om-dong, as evidence, was in the background, but it was noticeable that the stones had not reappeared on her neck.

"*Ja!*" Cornelius nodded at length. "De Groot, come here!"

The two Dutchmen stepped aside for a moment, and De Groot, saluting, went off toward the sea. Van Tromp turned to us.

"I accept your story herein, Mynheer Griggs," he said. "There are, it is true, certain matters for investigation still—" he twinkled all over and Griggs showed yellow teeth in a grin—"but they will probably be cleared up readily enough. Where, if I may ask—" he coughed importantly—"is the property in question?"

Griggs turned an adamantine eye on him.

"You prove to me that this play actin' woman's any better claim to them shiners than meself," he announced, "and maybe I'll tell you where they are just now. Till then," he slapped the butt of his rifle significantly, "they ain't on view!"

Van Tromp took me by the arm.

"Let us walk down to the beach," he said. "I have a boat coming off from the *Amboyna* and, if Mynheer Griggs will accompany us, I can maybe promise him a pleasant surprise."

We went together down the rough path toward sea-level, passing close to the three hummocks where lay Four-Times-He, the Portuguese, De Sousa, and Maxon. Van Tromp cast a glance at them and shook his head with grave humor, but Griggs walked on, nose in air, the picture of unconcern; you do not catch him that way. I believe Cornelius liked him more than ever.

The *Amboyna* lay half a mile out, and there was a boat coming ashore from her. The three of us stood on the sand waiting for it to come in, and in a moment or so Griggs gave vent to a long whistle.

"Gawd!" he ejaculated. "So that's yer surprise, Mister Policeman! Julie La Plante!" His face turned sour with rage. "See 'ere," he went on, "don't you expec' me to be polite to 'er, for I ain't a-goin' to be!" He ran his fingers along a half healed scar on the side of his head.

Van Tromp spoke with more authority than usual for him.

"Mynheer Griggs," he said, "you will oblige me by remaining silent until I give you leave to speak. I undertake that you will not be sorry."

GRIGGS looked at him hard, and I thought I detected something of admiration in the look, although police are the last folk he is likely to respect. The boat grounded on the shore, and Julie La Plante faced us.

"Well!"

Her voice was acrid and harsh, and her looks certainly did not belie what Griggs had told me of her. She was a tall, strapping brunette, probably in the middle

thirties, and there was a glint in her eye that told its tale; I wondered just what it was she had said to Cornelius in his office.

Whatever it was, things were clearly different now. He stepped up to her, very much the policeman in the execution of his duty.

"You will please to follow me, madame," he said shortly.

She stared at him a moment, then looked round at Griggs, venomously hostile, at De Groot, once more stiff at attention, and at me. A sudden silence fell upon us, and one could almost feel swift terror and suspicion taking hold of her. Van Tromp took her courteously by the arm and, still in silence, we walked up the path to the house.

At the doorway Om-dong met us and —upon so small things do events turn— flashed a childish grimace at the play actress. I saw her turn white under her coloring and flinch as if some one had struck her. Then, still silently, we entered the house and the room where Schultz lay on the bed.

The woman put her hands over her eyes a moment at the sight; then she faced round on Van Tromp.

"What's this?" she asked in a creaky voice. Cornelius put his hand in his pocket and drew out a paper.

"Madame," he said softly, "this was once a companion of mine. Now, he is dead—" betraying his trust. Do you not agree?

The little man spoke earnestly, as if attempting to reason with a difficult case. He held the paper folded in his hand, and his eyes were steady on Julie's face. There was high tragedy in the air—too high for Griggs. He cut in, his rifle cocked over his arm.

"See 'ere," he jerked out, "'ere's the 'ole silly game. This woman 'ere sends that—" he nodded at the still form on the bed— "down to see if 'e can't do me in, in the execution of 'is dooty, as you might say. 'E gives 'imself away, comin' the 'igh 'orse with me, an' what's more, tryin' to draw me into resistin' 'im, so 'e'd 'ave the chance to put me out an' nothin' said. You saw 'im try it once—" he turned to me— "ain't it so?"

I nodded, and Griggs went on.

"I 'ad 'im sized up mighty soon, an' so'd Om-dong, 'ere." He looked at the yellow girl, laughing mischievously at his elbow. "So we kind of faked up a little scheme, for 'er to put 'erself in 'is way, an' sure enough 'e falls for it! That's 'ow I killed 'im, Mister Dutchman, and you can chew on that!"

He grounded his rifle, his eyes on Van Tromp, Om-dong clinging to his sleeve, plump, devil-may-care, full of self-congratulatory little giggles. Cornelius addressed the woman.

"Is this so, madame?"

She had been standing there, her eyes on the dead policeman on the bed, apparently not listening to Griggs. Now she spoke, and it was with the trained voice of her profession, tones different from the harsh accents in which she had addressed us before. Julie La Plante held the stage and was conscious of it.

"Yes," she said, "this man swore to me that he would get my jewels. More, that he would finish this little hound here."

Griggs cut her short.

"Cheese it!" he said brutally. "This ain't no time for no 'eroics, missus! Your feller 'ere got 'is, all right—now you'll get yours!"

Van Tromp laid a detaining hand on his arm. "Be silent, Mynheer Griggs!" he commanded. He turned gravely to the woman.

"Madame," he said, "you have confessed to suborning this man here to murder. Indeed, I held in my hand your written instructions to him to kill Mynheer Griggs. It is my duty to arrest you . . ."

FOR AN instant the woman stood with head bowed, as if in thought. Then she suddenly flung herself on Griggs, screaming maledictions in half a dozen tongues and spitting foam from the corners of her mouth. The little cockney was taken by surprise and staggered back with the

woman clinging savagely to him, while we looked on almost in amusement at the violence of the assault.

Then Om-dong seemed to fly across the intervening space like a yellow flash, and at the same time we saw that the woman carried a knife. It was one of those jewel handled little poniards you may still come across in Indian trophies of arms, a venomous thing four or five inches long, and Julie La Plante was pecking viciously at Griggs with it, while he fenced her clumsily with his arms. Before any of us could move at Van Tromp's cry, Om-dong had grappled with the actress, there was a swirl and flurry of draperies, and Griggs, cursing heartily, collapsed on the bed with the dead Schultz.

De Groot had the actress by the shoulders in a moment and swung her clear of the little man, holding her by the back of the elbows. She was still struggling furiously, amid a torrent of tremendous profanity, and Van Tromp had seized her by the arm in an attempt to quiet her, when Griggs jumped to his feet with an imprecation that struck her silent.

The yellow girl, Om-dong, had slumped down by the bedside. A glance was enough to show that the little Indian dagger had found a mark after all; and as we looked at her she collapsed into herself with a gentle sigh.

Griggs, his truculent face suffused with passion, snatched for his Winchester, but Van Tromp anticipated him. He faced the cockney steadily.

"Enough, my friend!" he said, and there was a great deal more than mere police formality in his voice. "There is still law here, yes?" And while De Groot hustled the dark browed woman from the room, he knelt at the yellow girl's side.

Griggs stood entirely still while Van Tromp conducted the briefest of examinations, and the woman's curses died away outside; then, as Cornelius rose and laid a hand on his shoulder, with immense compassion and more than a hint of liking on his face, he abruptly wrenched himself free, and staggered out into the night.

We buried Om-dong next afternoon with every small ceremony that could be compassed in that backward place. Van Tromp surpassed himself in wordless sympathy, and I think there grew to be a great deal of affection between the formal little police officer and the drunken renegade and murderer who stood by the graveside. At the last, while the *Amboyna's* men were tamping the soil above the grave, a flicker of the old Griggs came back. He grinned lopsidedly.

"Damn' good little devil!" he said.

We tried to get him away; I believe Cornelius promised him peace and comfort and lashings of his beloved rum in Sourabaya, and I know I would have given much to have him a while a guest on my *Kittiwake*. But nothing stirred him; here he was, he said, and this was his place; let him stay there alone with old Hi Fat, and the two golden children that were all that were left to him of his yellow girl. And at last we gave up.

That night Van Tromp and I came ashore, bringing with us such gifts as we imagined might comfort a lonely man. There was a lantern in the trees as we walked up the path, and the sound of a mattock in the soft ground. Cornelius looked at me, and together we stole closer; Griggs was in his little burying ground where he had first laid Four-Times-He and the Portuguese, and then Maxon, and now Om-dong. He was stripped to the waist, digging yet another grave.

Cornelius turned to me in the dark.

"Prophecy, my friend!" he said.

And we set our gifts on the ground in the path, and returned on tiptoe to the boat, leaving Griggs to his solitude.

Bottle Messages *from the* Sea

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

SCRAWLED on canvas, on shavings, on sea stained leaves torn from log books; written in charcoal and sometimes in blood; such are the messages which drift ashore in bottles from the sea, from those in danger on the oceans of the world.

For hundreds of years, before wireless made contact with the land easy, seamen threw their bottle messages trustfully into the sea. Columbus wrote to his queen in that way. And today a sealed bottle still sometimes contains the last message of a despairing crew. Many a tragic message has been cast into the sea from many a stricken vessel. Messages such as these:

"Captain, all crew but me, John Williams, died yellow fever."

"Ship burned, only me, Sam Thomas, left in boat."

"Whoever picks this up will know barque *Caller Ou* run down by steamer."

The list of these bottles containing genuine news of disaster is pitifully long. There was that sad last message from the crew of the American tank steamer, *City of Everett*, which sank with all hands in the Gulf of Mexico during October, 1923. It was washed up in a bottle at Miami, Florida, ninety-nine days later, and it read:

"S. S. *Everett*. This is the last of us. To dear friends who find this, goodby for ever and ever."

Father Neptune sometimes takes much longer to deliver his mails. Years ago a black cook on board the British ship *Buckingham* murdered the master. The vessel was off the coast of Bermuda at the time. She carried no wireless, and the mate, fearing further violence, entrusted his report of the crime to a bottle. It was found 5000 miles away, on one of the Shetland Islands. Nearly three years had passed.

A bottle message told the world of the loss with all hands of the Atlantic liner *President*. She should have reached Liverpool in March, 1841, but became long overdue. At last a ship at sea picked up a bottle containing a message from the once famous comedian, Tyrone Power. It said that the vessel was sinking in a gale as he wrote.

In 1902 the Allan liner *Huronian* left Glasgow and disappeared. Five years later a bottle was washed up by the tide on the north coast of Ireland. Its message read:

"*Huronian* sinking fast. Top heavy. One side under water. Goodby mother and sister—Charles McFall."

Bottle messages were produced as evidence during an inquiry into the loss of the Grimsby trawler *Angus*. One which reached Norway read:

"Steamship *Angus*. All hands mutiny. Collision with foreign barque."

After the mysterious loss of the Australian liner *Waratah* between Durban and Cape Town, many bottle messages were found, but these were all believed to be cruel fakes.

Sealed bottles are often set adrift for scientific purposes. Many shipmasters are cooperating with British and American government departments at the present time by throwing bottles overboard. In this way the directions of ocean currents may be traced, for finders of these bottles are rewarded if they fill in the card enclosed in each one, giving particulars of the find.

Outlawry in the Modern West

The RANCH on RED RIVER

THEY were baling hay on Red River. Glover's stack pen, the one midway between ranch-house and creek, was a scene of noisy activity. Counting Glover, there were four men on the baler. Bales were tumbling from the machine as fast as two teams could haul them to a box car spotted five miles away at Red River Siding.

It should be understood that baling is usually accomplished by a three man crew. One man forks the hay into the orifice, or maw, at the baler's top; another squats at the rear end to insert blocks and tighten baling wires; a third is known as the bale wrangler. The wrangler merely drags each new bale out of the way and hoists it to the top of a neat pile of other fresh green bales.

On Glover's crew, however, there were four men; the fourth being Glover himself. Glover forked no hay into the maw, he tied no wires nor did he wrangle any bales. At intervals he directed an encouraging curse at the tired baling team if it lagged, a team which had to plod in weary circles all day clicking the baler's trip hammer twice in every revolution. Glover's major rôle, however, was one which required courage and skill greater

than that possessed by any of his subordinates.

Glover harvested, on an average, five hundred tons of alfalfa hay per year. His bales ran about thirty to the ton, which gave him some fifteen thousand bales to ship each winter season. He always had a market, for his brother, Rudolph Glover, was a feed broker of Kansas City, Missouri. Thus about fifteen thousand bales were shipped each winter season by Adolph Glover, from the ranch on Red River in southern New Mexico, to brother Rudolph's feed market.

"Step along there, you lazy crowbaits!" bawled Glover.

The baler team accelerated its gait and the trip hammer clicked. *Click! Creak! Click!* The monotonous clicks came at intervals of about ten seconds, each click making a "flake", or slab, in a bale of hay.

"Ed," went on Glover, addressing Ed Decker who was just pulling out of the stack pen with a forty bale load for the siding. "Ed, that'll be the last trip for you today, but when you pass Enrique on the road tell him to hurry back. He's due for another trip to the siding before supper. Move along there, you ornery crowbaits, move along!"

Ed's wagon, loaded with its high green prism, creaked out of the stack pen. The baling team remained to tread its everlasting treadmill, round and round; the springs tightened and slacked; the trip hammer in the bowels of the baler clicked, clicked, clicked.

The three Mexican baler hands sweated copiously. Nevertheless, they much preferred their own heavier labor to the more perilous rôle assumed by Glover. But Glover was used to it; he had performed his stint fifteen thousand times in each of the last three winters. He knew, of course, that men had been known to lose fingers and even arms by reaching them down into the maw of a clicking hay baler. But Glover always timed his own movement with the release of the trip hammer. He'd reach his arm in just after the click, when the tension of the spring was at lowest ebb. Moreover, he had adjusted the baler to make light, loose bales instead of tight, heavy ones.

So he took his chances. Just as each bale was in mid march through the horizontal tunnel below the maw, Adolph Glover would reach down into the opening and insert, upright, a quart bottle of Mexico whisky. He would jerk his hand out before the next trip of the hammer. *Bang!* The hay would be squeezed around the bottle, seldom if ever breaking the glass. A few seconds later the bale would tumble out, to be wrangled by the wrangler, its spurious merchandise sealed within.

Fifteen thousand bales! Fifteen thousand quarts! No tax, no worry as to Prohibition officers, no transportation costs! For the hay, on its own merit, paid freight and a profit. *Creak! Click! Creak! Click!* "Move along you lazy crowbaits!" The hay business, Red River to the Kaw, was indeed a sweet racket for the Glovers.

THE "up" passenger hesitated for a second or so at Red River Siding, and from it Tom Hargrove descended to the cinder platform. Hargrove was a tenderfoot hailing from Albany, New York. He had never before, in the twenty-five years of his life, been in the State of New Mexico. Nevertheless, he was the owner, in fee simple, of a certain hay ranch in this locality, a property under lease to one Adolph Glover.

When the train passed on, Tom Hargrove found himself isolated with his suitcase, a depot, a water tank, a box car over on the side track and a horizon of alkali dust. Closer inspection revealed a sleepy telegraph operator inside the depot's open

window, and a man whose wagon was drawn up beside the box car and who was heaving bales of hay into the car.

"How far is it," Hargrove called in the window to the operator, "to the Hargrove ranch on—I mean to the Glover ranch on Red River?"

The operator left his keys and slouched out to the platform.

"You see that there line of cottonwoods?" he addressed Tom, leading him to a corner of the depot and pointing south. "That there's the crik they call Red River. River my eye! It's about a foot and a half wide except when it rains. Back where I come from they wouldn't even call it a spring branch. Out here they call it Red River. You see them buildings? That's Glover's layout. Are you heading that way?"

"Yes," responded Hargrove, as he gazed south toward the building group and erroneously appraised the distance as the equivalent of a dozen city blocks, whereas actually it was a full five miles. "Thanks. Yes, I'm heading for Glover's."

"A dusty walk," responded the operator, pulling the green eye shade lower over his eyes as he squinted up at the warm December sun. "But maybe you can get a ride back with Ed Decker. That's Ed there, loading hay. He works for Ad Glover. 'Scuse me. I hear that dispatcher banging out my call, damn him!"

The operator dodged back into the depot.

Tom, lugging his suitcase, walked down the cinders some fifty yards to the box car. He observed that the teamster, Ed Decker, was just carring the last bale of his load. When he reached the wagon, Tom was not at all prepossessed by Decker's appearance. The ranch hand, by virtue of a broken nose and a heavy six-gun suspended from his right hip, impressed Hargrove as a cross between a broken down prizefighter and a highjacker. Nor did Tom like the way the man was looking at him.

Standing on the hay frame, Decker had whirled to face Tom with an expression which was more than insolent. It seemed to be deliberately hostile. The teamster's lip curled as he inquired:

"Well! Well! What's on your mind, bo?"

Tom grinned at the term of address. It reminded him that perhaps he did resemble a hobo. There was a reason for that. Tom Hargrove, nonresident owner of the ranch on Red River, had come West to hire out as a laborer to his own tenant. It was in his mind to take over the reins of management ultimately, to operate the property himself at the expiration of Adolph Glover's lease. Yet the young man realized his own inexperience and incompetence. By working for Glover for the unexpired period of the lease he would be effectively schooling himself in the ranch business. Yet for quite honorable reasons he had planned not to let Glover know his true identity.

Thus he had deliberately garbed himself in rough clothes, an outfit of shabby denims and badly worn boots, so that he might appear to be an itinerant farm hand out of work. He did not want to be the boss's pet. He wanted to rough it, to begin at the bottom; was even willing to work as chore boy for his board till he learned the business. He wanted to mix with the other hands on an equal footing; he did not believe he could do that if it were known that he was landlord of them all, that he owned every acre of the ranch in fee simple.

"I was just tryin' to figure," Tom responded, trying valiantly to talk his chosen part, "how I could get out to Glover's place. Feller in the depot says you work for him. What about a ride back to the ranch on your hay frame?"

Decker stiffened. Tom noticed that his knobby jaw shot out more belligerently than ever and that an angry flush suffused the flat wreck of his nose.

"What the hell business you got with Ad Glover?" he snapped at Tom.

"I was aimin' to get a job on his outfit," explained Tom.

"You was, was you? Well, not a thing stirrin'. Ad's full up. And if he wasn't,

he wouldn't take on no tenderfoot bo like you."

"But no harm in me ridin' back with you and havin' a powwow with Glover, is there?" persisted Hargrove.

"Nothin' stirrin', I said," snapped Decker. "I ain't runnin' no taxi line. On your way."

Decker whirled back to the box car. He pulled its sliding door shut and snapped a padlock through its hasp, locking it. He then slapped at his team with a whip. The hay wagon wheeled away from the siding, was driven through a gateway in the right-of-way fence and south down a dusty road. Decker, standing upright on his frame, scowled back at Hargrove as the team proceeded homeward at a trot.

Tom, remaining there by the siding, was at a loss to understand the man's motive of discourtesy. He had observed the snapping of a padlock on the car door but attached no importance to it. He was not even aware that partially loaded hay cars are not usually locked between loads. He concluded with a shrug that Decker was nothing more than an ill mannered ruffian and that he, Hargrove, would receive a much better reception from Glover himself.

Anyway, Tom had come too far, all the way from Albany, New York, to be discouraged by a turndown from a mere teamster. So, with his suitcase in hand, he passed through the right-of-way gate and began trudging down the dusty road in the wake of Decker's wagon.

WHAT he had misjudged as a mile proved to be five. But Tom was game. He had been stroke on his college crew and knew how to stand the gaff. He trudged on, a trampish figure in denims, old boots and a disreputable black felt hat. The afternoon sun of Southern New Mexico brought sweat to his brow. Every ten minutes or so he set his suitcase on the ground and rested. After he had walked three miles, the building group of the Red River ranch, set beside a line of creek alamos, appeared nearly as far away as when he had started.

Yet, in spite of his fatigue, the view of it was a lure. It was his own. That meadowed valley was his, and he could see that it stretched in a narrow ribbon for miles along the creek. Until now he had never seen anything but a map of it. Here, before his eyes, lay the domain itself—his own. For years he had nursed an ambition to become the resident lord of it, to operate the ranch himself. But first he would serve an apprenticeship to his tenant, Glover.

He walked another weary mile and again stopped to rest. From here he could make out details in the long chain of Red River meadows. He saw batteries of brown mounds, hay stacks. He knew that Glover operated the ranch strictly for commercial hay, feeding no cattle at all. Tom had other ideas. Once he himself took charge, he planned to run cattle on leased summer range and feed his hay out on the home place in winter. He was widely read, and such Western lore as he had gleaned from books inclined him toward such a program. But if Glover wanted to bale and car hay, that, during Glover's tenancy, was of course Glover's right.

Tom picked up his suitcase and trudged on. He saw Decker, half a mile ahead, drive his wagon through an open gate and trot toward a high red barn. At the barn the teamster unhitched, leading his team into the barn, which informed Tom that the man had hauled his last load of the day. The sun was indeed getting low, almost balanced on the table of a mesa to the west.

Yet obviously more than one team was hauling. Tom observed another wagon, its frame piled high with green bales, emerge from a stack pen in a meadow between buildings and creek and proceed at a walk toward the front gate through which Decker had just passed.

It was exactly at this gate that Tom met this second wagon. He observed that its driver was a heavy set, pock cheeked Mexican. Tom, standing aside to let the

loaded wagon pass through the gate, called out a friendly word of greeting. The Mexican did not even look at him. He drove through the gate and on without reply. But as he did so the side of his high bulging load of bales scraped against one of the tall gate posts. One of the bales, by the friction of the gate post, was rubbed out from under its bind rope. It tumbled to the ground. Even had the driver turned his head he would not have seen it, due to the high, wide screen of his own load. The wagon creaked on toward the depot at Red River Siding.

It was then that Tom saw the signs on the gate posts. The sign on one post read:

ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING. A. GLOVER

On the opposite post a sign read:

KEEP OUT! THIS MEANS YOU

"What—is Glover running—a powder factory?" Tom wondered aloud as he stared at the signs.

Why should Glover be so touchy about trespassers? Tom seated himself for a moment on the fallen bale of hay to ponder this point. It seemed all out of focus with what he had read of ranches and ranch hospitality. He decided that Glover must have had trouble with petty thieves lately. Or perhaps some intruding hunter had shot a colt or a calf. Surely the signs did not affect a peaceful job seeker such as himself.

The young man shrugged his lean shoulders and arose from the bale. Still lugging his infernal suitcase, he began trudging the final quarter mile from front gate to ranch-house. He had seen nothing of Decker since that surly individual had disappeared within the barn. But down in the nearest meadow, between house and creek, Tom could see another team plodding in a circle while four men were grouped about some sort of machine.

Reaching the main house of the group, Tom knocked at the door. This was opened, albeit but a crack, by a moon faced Oriental. Tom assumed that he was ranch cook.

"I'd like to see Mr. Glover," announced Tom.

"Glover, him down stack plen. Balee alflafee," responded the Oriental. Then quite bruskly he slammed the door in Tom's face.

More insolence! Hargrove could not understand it. Never before in his dealings with men had he encountered such a consistent display of rudeness as greeted him here, on his own ranch!

NEVERTHELESS, the young Easterner was persistent in his determination to see Adolph Glover himself. By the cook's information, Glover was down at the stack pen with the balers; so Tom left his suitcase on the porch and strolled toward the meadow. By now the sun had completely disappeared behind the western mesa and winter twilight was fast descending upon Red River. Tom could see, however, that the baling crew was still at work. Its team milled about in an endless circle and men were still active about the baler.

A short way from the house there was a gate leading into an alfalfa meadow. At this season there was of course no standing crop; merely stubble with a green sprig here and there coaxed out by a freak warm spell in December. Here again on this interior gate Tom saw signs which read:

NO TRESPASSING

KEEP OUT! THIS MEANS YOU

However, the gate was open for the convenience of hay haulers and Tom passed through. He had hardly taken a dozen steps into the meadow when he saw one of the men in the stack pen leap to the back of a saddled horse and ride toward him at a gallop. The rider was a big man with a beet red face, with a hunch of shoulders which amounted almost to a deformity. He wore a blue shirt and red suspenders. As he approached, Tom could see that he was tugging at some object at the side of his saddle. Up it came—a rifle! The

man with the beet red face whipped it to his shoulder and fired twice over Tom's head. Tom halted in alarm.

"Can't you read them signs? Whatcha doin' in here? Get out."

The rider, reaching Hargrove, drew his horse to haunches and towered over the intruder with rifle still at aim.

"Get the hell out of here, I said," he bawled.

He was in a quivering rage. His fury seemed to Hargrove out of all proportion to the nature of the offense.

"Keep your shirt on," Tom answered. Tom Hargrove had never been a coward. "I'm not aiming to steal a hay stack or anything. Just wanted to see Mr. Glover, that's all."

"I'm Glover," roared the big man. Tom now saw that his seventeen inch neck, leaning forth horizontally from his shoulders, was quite as red as his face. "I'm Glover," the man repeated. "Who the hell are you?"

"Armstrong, Joe Armstrong," responded Tom. "I'm looking for a job of work. What about—"

"Not a thing doin'. Fan your shanks off this ranch before I shoot daylight through you."

"But, Mr. Glover, I—"

"None of your damn' lip. Step out and keep goin'."

Crack! The rifle banged again. A bullet plowed into earth squarely between Tom's boots.

"Next time you get it in the belly," threatened Glover. "Now beat a sneak off this ranch and don't come back."

Tom realized that any other move than retreat would be folly. And suddenly he lost all stomach for getting a job under Glover in any case. The man was not straight. Tom was sure of it.

"Hop along," repeated Glover, again raising the rifle.

Tom turned away and walked dispiritedly out of the meadow. He arrived at the house, took his suitcase from the porch and then walked in supreme dejection toward the front gate at the main road.

When he reached it, the shadows of dusk had thickened.

Where should he go? He was sorely exasperated at the reception accorded him on his own ranch. He doubted whether he would have bettered it had he explained that he was Tom Hargrove from Albany, New York, owner of the property. He had an idea that Glover would have been just as diligent in running him off.

To think the thing out Hargrove again sat down upon the fallen hay bale, the bale which had tumbled from the Mexican's load. He sat there until it was quite dark. He then realized that he was a long ways from an available bed.

Where should he spend the night? No use to tramp five miles back to Red River Siding, because when he got there he would find nothing there but a depot and a padlocked box car. He recalled that Horton, the county seat, was the next station down the railroad. But that would be a hike of ten miles.

Should he tackle it? It was quite dark. Tom did not know the country. And he was dog tired. He would probably get lost and wander about the range in circles.

Why not camp out all night? Somehow the idea appealed to him. He had come West to rough it, so why balk at the first opportunity? Fifty yards to the left of the gate he saw an irrigation ditch, the main feeder which watered Glover's meadows. On the bank of it, just outside the fence, was a large cottonwood. Why not, thought Tom, sleep out all night on the bank of the ditch under the cottonwood? He could drink from the ditch. At dawn he could start reasonably refreshed on the ten mile hike to Horton, having no great difficulty keeping his direction by daylight. Time to decide his next move when he reached Horton.

As for a bed, what about this bale of alfalfa? It was made for his purpose, Hargrove decided. So he dragged the bale the fifty yards to the ditch bank, placing it near the bole of the cottonwood tree. From the small flow of water in the ditch he quenched his thirst. As for hunger, he took another notch in his belt, thankful

for the memory of a very excellent dinner he had consumed at two o'clock on the dining car.

TOM now produced his pocket knife and prepared to cut the three wires of his bale, wires which compressed the sixty five pounds of stem and leaf into a tight parallelopiped. He was sawing on the first wire when he heard the creak of wagon wheels. He paused a moment. He desired no further encounter with Glover or Glover's men.

He saw the shape of a wagon, a man sitting on its flat frame, coming down the road from the direction of Red River Siding. This would be the Mexican, thought Tom, returning from having carried his last load of bales. The wagon creaked through the gate and went on to Glover's barn.

And now for a mattress of hay. Hargrove cut the three wires which bound his bale, one by one. As the last wire was severed, the hay, its tension released, popped this way and that, falling in a broad thick mattress on the ground under the cottonwood. To his infinite amazement Tom saw, lying in the center of this newly unfolded mattress, just as though the hand of some magician had reached it there from the night, a quart bottle.

It was filled with a liquid. It had a cork. Tom's knife was one of those all-purpose pocket implements equipped with a corkscrew; thus it did not take him long to remove the cork. He smelled the contents of the bottle.

"Boil my eyebrows!" he muttered, "Why, this is booze and not such bad booze at that. The real stuff! All of which makes Glover's trespass signs as plain as mud."

Everything was now quite transparent to Hargrove. He knew Glover was a whisky runner, was shipping liquor in baled hay. His first reaction was one of amusement.

Then the more serious aspect of the circumstance began to afflict his mind. When he remembered that the ranch on Red River was his own, Glover's liquor racket began to impress Hargrove as a personal indignity.

The more he thought about it the less he liked it. It was his own property, and Glover's illicit practice of using it stuck in Tom's craw. Now that he knew of it, if he kept silent about it, he would be, or at least his conscience would consider him, a partner to crime both before and after the fact. The thing went beyond a mere rupture of prohibition laws. It entailed misdeclaration of farm produce, a cheating of the railroad, a shipping of high tariff merchandise under cheap rates of hay.

And, thought Tom, he did not want his perfectly good stock ranch outlawed. He would stop it. He decided to take the quart bottle into Horton tomorrow and use it as evidence to put the skids under Glover.

Another thought struck him. Why not use Glover's illegal deportment as means to annul Glover's lease? Glover had leased a ranch, not a distillery. Glover had profaned the spirit of his lease, which distinctly made use of the phrase "agricultural purposes only." Tom was sure that a court would support his demand that the lease be annulled.

He, Tom Hargrove, could then run the ranch himself. True, he was a tenderfoot, but he could employ an experienced and honest Western foreman. The idea pleased him. After all, it would be better this way. He would not have to hire out as a second class hand pending the expiration of Glover's lease. He could start right off the bat as Tom Hargrove, rancher and stock feeder.

With the quart of evidence he would put the skids under Glover. With this thought Tom lay down on his mattress of hay. He had fatigue and youth so it took him but a short time to fall asleep.

While he slept, two men emerged from the ranch-house and walked briskly toward the main gate at the road. One was a big florid man with hunched shoulders, Adolph Glover. The other was his *segundo*, the only gringo on his pay roll, Ed Decker.

"I don't like it," Glover was complain-

ing. "That's why I always put exactly forty bales on a load and keep a check on 'em. Sanchez left the stack pen with forty bales on his last trip, but when he got to the car he only had thirty-nine."

"He must have sloughed one somewhere on the road," suggested the flat nosed and knob chinned Ed Decker.

"If he did I'll nail his greasy hide to the barn wall," snarled Glover. "I don't aim to have no bales sloughed off on no public road."

"Betcha a Mex peso he scraped it off at the front gate," responded Decker, hitching at his baggy and gun weighted pants. "That gate never was none too wide for a load of hay. Naturally a good driver like me can get through all right. But Sanchez!" Decker spat contemptuously. "Why, that greaser couldn't drive a burro cart through Wagon Wheel Gap without hubbin' the rimrock."

They arrived at the main gate and looked around for a bale of hay. They found none at the gate. But a three-quarter moon had just topped the eastern plain, and thus Glover was afforded a mellow light in which he could distinguish objects as far distant as a hundred yards. Thus he saw a certain patch of dark over under a cottonwood on the bank of his ditch. Closer investigation disclosed the prone figure of a man, apparently asleep on a makeshift mattress of hay.

"Unlimber your gun, Ed," cautioned Glover. "This looks bad."

They catfooted over to the cottonwood. There they saw Hargrove asleep on his spread of hay. Three unrusted baling wires lying nearby indicated that he had made his bed by cutting open a hay bale. More to the point, there was a quart bottle of whisky standing on the ground not a yard away from one of the sleeper's outstretched hands.

Decker's gun came out. He covered the prone man while Glover treated himself to a session of eloquent profanity.

"The damn' sneak!" Glover finished. "He's a dick, and he's on to us high, wide and handsome. He's the same jasper what come bustin' up just before dark, claimin' he wanted a job. Job my eye! He's got one already. He's a dick. Sanchez spilled a bale at the gate and this bird glommed the evidence."

"Oh, I guess he's just a bo," said Decker. "I seen him at the depot and he jumped me for a ride to the ranch. A dick would have come slewfootin' around after dark, wouldn't he, Ad?"

"No," contested Glover. "These here detectives allers breeze up claimin' they're somebody they ain't. This jasper give the name of Joe Armstrong. Betcha that ain't his name at all. Lucky we caught him asleep, Ed. He's our meat now. First thing we do is ditch this bottle."

So saying, Glover picked up the quart bottle and broke it against the bole of the cottonwood. The broken pieces of glass he scraped with his boot into the ditch.

"Go through him, Ed," Glover then instructed his companion.

Decker sheathed his gun and went through Hargrove's pockets. He found no weapon. He found no card of identification. He did find, however, a leather wallet which contained six hundred dollars in currency.

Glover sneered. He needed no further proof that Joe Armstrong, the out-of-work farm hand, was a fake. No man with six hundred dollars in his pocket would be looking for a cheap job on a hay ranch. Glover crammed the six hundred dollars into his own pocket and then directed Decker to search the suitcase which he saw leaning against the cottonwood.

In the suitcase Decker again failed to find a card of identification. However, he did discover a tailor made suit of the finest fabric, together with several white shirts and collars. He even found a pair of silk pajamas. Tom Hargrove had not traveled all the way from New York garbed in his present outlay of denims. Having had to live for three days in Pullmans and dining cars, he had comported himself according to the dictates of his pride. Only a half hour before arriving at Red River Siding had he changed into the denims.

This further evidence induced another

vociferous fit of profanity from Glover, so clear was it now that the alleged Joe Armstrong was an impostor. Glover's expletives were so loud that they awakened Hargrove.

TOM sat up, rubbing his eyes. He saw Glover's red face bending over him. Glover's big hairy right hand shot out and grabbed Tom by the neck.

He jerked Tom to his feet.

"Didn't I tell you," thundered Glover, "to beat a sneak off this range?"

Tom could feel the man's great fingers digging into his throat. The New York boy lacked perhaps forty pounds of Glover's weight. But being neither a coward nor a weakling in muscle, Tom struck out with both fists at the pit of Glover's stomach.

Once with his right and once with his left Tom jabbed in under the arm which held him by the throat, and Glover, surprised, buckled just enough to allow Tom to break away. Then Glover let forth a bullish bellow. He charged Tom, swinging both hairy fists. Tom ducked. Stepping to the left a pace, he planted a neat right on Glover's chin. Glover slipped on the mattress of slick hay and went to his knees. Then—*crack!* It was Ed Decker who put an end to the conflict. Coming up from behind, Decker brought the barrel of his gun down with stunning force on Tom's skull. Tom slumped to the ground, completely out.

In fact, for a few moments his assailants thought he was dead. Finally Decker, kneeling, reported that the man's heart still beat.

"Shall I bump him?" he asked Glover.

Glover, rubbing his bruised chin, profaned the night air with another orgy of profanity. Finally he answered:

"We'll put it up to Yarrow. Meantime we'll lock this jasper up, Ed. If Yarrow says bump him, we bump him. We orter do the same thing to that greaser, Sanchez. Sanchez got us into this jam by spillin' the bale."

"It's a good thing he did," reminded Decker. "This dick would have copped one of them bottles anyway, sooner or later. And now, just as you say, Ad, he's our meat."

"Yep, he's our meat," agreed Glover; "but what I want to know is—who sent him here? Who's he workin' for? Maybe he's a Government man. I ain't afraid of nobody in the county. Yarrow's got the county sewed up tight. But this bird's from the outside. If we turn him loose he reports to his boss, and then hell's to pay."

"He can't prove nothin', though," wheezed Decker. "We busted this bottle and we can ditch all the stuff on hand at the stack pen."

"But they's eight cars rollin' between here and K. C," reminded Glover. "We can't ditch them. Once my brother Rudolph gets them unloaded, they're safe. But on the way they're like so many cars of dynamite. If this guy reports what he found in this one bale, his people would make the railroad sidetrack them eight cars and frisk the works. So, we'll put it up to Yarrow. That's what he's paid for, ain't it?"

Having made this decision, Glover and Decker carried the unconscious victim of their assault through the gate and a quarter of a mile to the building group. There they tossed him into a grain crib and locked the door. Ed Decker was then ordered to saddle his horse and bring Claude Yarrow out from Horton.

"Yarrow'll know what to do. He comes high, but doggone him, he's got brains. Stick a fast bronc under him, Ed, and get him here before daylight," instructed Glover, as Decker rode off.

TWO hours before dawn Yarrow arrived at the Red River ranch. Decker returned with him, but retired immediately in order to leave Yarrow in private conference with Glover.

"Ed tells me you're in a jam, Adolph," Yarrow began, as he seated himself in Glover's office and crossed his thin legs.

He had just ridden ten miles in a saddle,

but, in general appearance, he might have made the journey from town in a closed cab. In court or out, District Attorney Claude Yarrow always wore a frock coat. It was as much a part of him as his hard frozen face which never smiled. True, his coat tails were ruffled from the ride and his trouser legs had crept halfway to his knees from friction against the stirrup rings. Yarrow adjusted the latter sartorial deficiency now, as he opened conference with Glover. Then pushing back the gray-black hairs of his impeccable pompadour, he continued in a colorless voice:

"Ed says you're in a jam. A bale fell off a hay load and a dick found it. You locked the dick up and then passed the buck to me. Correct me if I have misstated facts, Adolph."

Glover nodded sourly. There was no correcting Yarrow. Yarrow was always just that precise.

"But why shouldn't I pass the buck to you?" wheezed Glover. "This is the first slip I made, ain't it? For three years you been glommin' your split, haven't you? Now damn' you, earn your money! What shall I do with this dick?"

Yarrow, district attorney and political czar of the county, the very same official to whom Hargrove would, if left alone, have taken his quart bottle of evidence in the morning, kept a perfect poker face as he answered Glover.

"Do nothing with him. Leave him locked up for ten days. Then turn him loose."

"Turn him loose? He'll squeal."

"Squeals," explained Yarrow, "never hurt anybody unless supported by evidence. In ten days the eight cars en route will have reached Rudolph in Kansas City. Then it will be this dick's story against yours. If he is a dick! I don't believe he is."

"Why not?"

"He's no local officer, because local officers are under my command. And a Government man wouldn't work that way. If a U. S. dick had suspicions of your racket, he'd ride up with a posse and a search warrant and search your layout from bin to creek. I think this man you have is just a common bum that's knocked some dude over for his wallet and suitcase, and wants to hide out by getting a job for the winter on some peaceful ranch. His finding the bale was only an accident. He broke it because he needed a bed. No doubt he planned to swig the liquor down when he awoke, and then go his way rejoicing."

"Why not turn him loose right now, then?" suggested Glover, mopping the sweat from his brow in evident relief.

"No use taking chances," cautioned Yarrow. "Keep him locked up until Rudolph wires an O. K. of every car."

"What about the car we got half loaded on the siding now? It's our wind-up for the season. We've shipped forty-four cars since October first, and now we're on the last stack, except a few too badly bleached to market. Just got enough red-eye to come out even, too."

Yarrow pondered the point thoughtfully. Finally he decreed:

"Well, nine cars en route won't be any worse than eight. Finish loading this last car tomorrow and bill it out. Put all hands on the baler in the morning, and then wind up the carring end in the afternoon with all teams. There's nothing else you can do except go to the siding in the morning and unload the hundred or so bales already on the car and destroy them. If you did that the depot operator would see you, and wonder why. His testimony might later tend to support any squeal made by this man you got locked up. As it is, there's nothing to support his story except his own word. A bo's word don't go very far. You combat it by saying you know nothing of a bottle of liquor in a hay bale, that it must have been a private bottle cached there by your teamster Sanchez. The hobo, you'll claim, was a moocher you'd ordered off the ranch. You'll claim his squeal is just a cheap, soreheaded play for revenge."

"Gotcha," agreed Adolph Glover, rubbing his great hairy hands in satisfaction. "Have a drink on the outfit, Yarrow.

Then you better fan back to town."

He poured the D. A. a generous drink of liquor.

Yarrow drained his glass and then arose to depart.

"In the meantime," was his final caution to Glover, "don't do any physical harm to this bum in your crib. Keep him locked up, but give him all he wants to eat. If he'd croak it would be pretty hard to laugh off."

YARROW, the tails of his frock coat flapping in the night wind and his trousers legs again creeping to his knees, rode away toward Horton. Morning dawned. Glover marshaled his entire crew to the stack pen, to bale out the final stack and thus acquire the necessary one hundred and fifty bales to complete the loading of S. P. Box Car No. 105,469.

Tom Hargrove, conscious these last few hours but with his head throbbing, crouched on the floor of his prison, a slatted grain crib. About dawn he arose to his feet and shook the crib's door. He found it padlocked on the outside.

The cracks between slats were about four inches wide. Tom reached an arm out between slats and twisted the padlock, but could not break it. Then he began pacing his confinement miserably, trying to scheme some program which would lead to escape.

Complete view of the immediate environs was afforded him, due to the four-inch space between slats of the crib. Thus he witnessed the departure of Glover and his crew for the bailing pen. He also witnessed, about a half hour later, the approach of the Chinese cook with a platter of food.

Immediately Tom tensed his muscles, the idea of assaulting the Chinese flashing to his mind. Once the cook unlocked the padlock and entered with the food . . .

But no such luck. The Oriental did not go to the door side of the crib at all. He merely poked the platter of food, which consisted of a generous slab of cold ham, four hardboiled eggs and a loaf of bread, in between the slats. Tom, ravenously hungry, took the food gratefully, for the moment relinquishing hope of escape.

Thirst as well as hunger assailed Tom. He thus called to the cook.

"Water! What about water?"

"Me blingee clanteen," assured the Oriental, turning away and waddling off toward the house.

It was then that an almost certain scheme of escape occurred to Hargrove. He set the platter of food down without tasting it. He looked about for a rope. There was none in the crib. In fact, there was nothing in the crib except four or five sacks of shelled corn. Obviously the crib was not used for the purpose of storing crop, but for the purpose of keeping bought feed on hand for the feeding of work teams and saddle horses. Thus the four or five sacks of shelled corn.

Tom sprang to them, emptied one sack on the floor. With all haste he began tearing the burlap into broad, stout strips. These he tied together and made a rope as long as the width of the crib. He then stood by to await the cook's arrival with the canteen of water.

The Oriental came. His hand came through the slats, extending the canteen. Instead of grasping the canteen, Tom, with a quick movement, slipped a noose he had made in one end of his makeshift rope over both canteen and wrist. He sprang back to the center of the crib, pulling as hard as he could on the rope.

The cook yelled, dropping the canteen as the tension on his wrist tightened and he felt his arm being drawn within the crib. Tom pulled harder and harder. The cook yelled louder and louder. Tom rendered two silent prayers; one that the rope would not break, the other that the baling crew, perhaps a half mile distant at the stack pen, would not hear the cook's yells. He reasoned that his chances in the latter instance were good, because Glover must be baling by now and would hardly hear distant sounds above the clicks and creaks of his baler.

So Tom braced his feet against the floor and pulled with all his might. The bur-

lap rope held. The victim's arm came farther and farther through the four-inch crack until the arm, even to shoulder pit, was entirely within the crib. By this time Tom was backed against the opposite wall of the crib. Over a slat in this opposite wall he took a half hitch with his rope. Then he tied the rope at the maximum possible tension. The Chinese bleated and screamed. But there he was, flattened tight against the outside of the crib and trussed like a Pilgrim culprit in the stocks.

Would he have a bunch of keys on him? Probably, because being cook, housekeeper and chore boy of the ranch the Chinese must naturally have the run of every door. Luck favored Hargrove in this respect. When he reached an arm out between slats and frisked the cook's pockets he found what he wanted, a bunch of keys.

He crossed to the door side of the crib. At the door he again extended an arm out between slats and tried key after key in the padlock. One fitted. Tom opened the door and stepped from the crib a free man.

The Chinese was still yelling like a full pack of coyotes on the night of earliest October frost. In such a plight Hargrove was content to leave him. The baling crew could release the fellow when they came home at noon.

What to do now? The first thing, Tom decided, was to eat and drink. So he reentered the crib and brought out the platter of food and the canteen. He ate the slab of ham and took a drink of water. Then he put the bread and the four boiled eggs in his pockets, slung the canteen over his shoulder and prepared to evacuate the ranch.

First he crept to a corner of a deserted outhouse to reconnoiter his route of departure. He also wanted to see what Glover's crew was doing. He could easily see the crew at work around the baler down in the creak bottom meadow. On the far edge of the meadow ran Red River, thickly fringed with plum brush, capulins and cottonwoods. Except for this thick park of brush along the creek there was no screen or shelter on all the horizon.

It occurred to Hargrove that the safest way to leave the country would be to get into that fringe of brush and follow it in the general direction of Horton. If he struck across the range afoot, he might be seen by one of Glover's men and pursued. He would be at the mercy of a mounted pursuer. But if he could just get within that dense screen of creek brush, he would be safe.

Then he saw how he could do it. There was a fence leading from the building group to the creek, a dividing fence between two meadows. This fence was now a wall of Russian thistles, or windblown tumbleweeds, lodged against it; which is the chronic condition of New Mexico fences in the wintertime. By creeping along behind that wall of tumbleweeds, Tom reasoned that he could make the creek without being observed by the crew at the stack pen.

Putting this plan into execution, he was soon creeping, hunched over like a half open jackknife, behind the wall of tumbleweeds toward the creek. In this journey he had to pass within two hundred yards of the baler, and as he did so he could hear every creak and click of the machine. He could even hear Adolph Glover bellowing—

"Step along there, you lazy crowbaits!"

Creak! Click! Creak! Click!

Tom peered through the tumbleweeds and saw that Glover was driving his crew at full speed. He saw the baler team plod around and around, heard it cursed by Glover if it so much as lagged a step. He saw a swarthy Mexican forking green hay from the squat remains of a stack into the baler's maw. He saw Ed Decker helping a second Mexican wrangle bales as they fell from the machine, stacking them in a tiered heap five bales high. But what interested Tom most were the duties of Glover himself. Quite distinctly he could see Glover pick a whisky bottle from a case at intervals, and reach it down into the vertical maw of the baler.

Tom watched these maneuvers in com-

plete fascination for some moments. He recalled that he had lost the bottle of last night's encounter; that he had no evidence to offer in Horton except the evidence of his own word. At all costs he must get hold of another bottle.

Tom's blood was up. The treatment of being locked in the crib did not tend to make him less purposeful to annul Glover's lease and oust him from the property. He must get evidence. Then it occurred to him that a bottle of liquor would not be very convincing evidence. The defendant could claim that it was just any random bottle, and had nothing to do with his own baling operations. The thing to do, thought Tom, would be to get possession of an unbroken bale of hay. If such a thing were broken open in court, and the bottle allowed to pop out on the courtroom floor, surely any jury would be convinced of Glover's illicit traffic.

After all, he mused, why not hide in some secure thicket of the brush all day and then, after dark, slip up to the stack pen and steal a bale of hay? He could drag it to a thicket and hide it, and later have deputies bring it to court.

Mulling over this plan, Tom crept along another fifty yards behind the wall of tumbleweeds. He then paused behind an especially inviting peephole to again spy on Glover.

Creak! Click! Creak! Click!

"Step along there, you lazy crowbaits," roared Glover. "Push on your fork, Emilio. How many bales does that make, Arturo? *Cinquenta? Bueno.* Another fifty and we're done. And remember, Ed, that car gets billed out in time to be picked up by the Red Ball freight this afternoon, whether we get it full of hay or not. Move along, you ornery crowbaits!"

Tom Hargrove, two hundred yards from the stack pen, could hear every snapping release of the spring, could hear every punching bang of the trip hammer within the baler.

Then suddenly some instance of peculiar drama occurred at the machine, a circumstance whose exact nature Hargrove could not make out from his point of espionage. He heard Adolph Glover scream. He saw him fall. Glover suddenly leaped back from his stance over the baler's maw, and the shriek which escaped his lips rent the very welkin with its shrill note of terror. It was charged with mortal agony. Tom saw Glover fall to the ground beside the baler. He heard no second cry from the man's lips. Apparently he had been instantly killed, or else was in a dead faint.

The crew sprang to the assistance of Glover. Work stopped as though doomsday had suddenly descended upon Red River. Tom heard Ed Decker yell:

"Criminy! He'll bleed to death. Gimme that rag, Emilio. Every damn' rag you can find. Sanchez, is your hauling team ready? Get set for a dead run to the siding. If you make the down local with him, he might live."

The stack pen became a beehive of activity. Tom saw men scurrying around the prone form of Glover. He saw Sanchez bring up his team and hay frame from where it had been hitched to a pen post. The entire crew was yelling hysterically, running about like mad. Even the much cursed baling team continued its endless circle for a few minutes, until Decker noticed it and bawled, "Whoa!" But having just been adjured by Glover himself to "step along, you lazy crowbaits!" the baler team made two full revolutions on its treadmill of labor before coming to a halt.

ALL THIS Tom Hargrove witnessed from his hiding place behind the tumbleweeds. He saw Glover hoisted to the bare frame of Sanchez's wagon. Sanchez lashed the team and it streaked across the meadow at a gallop. Another Mexican was with Sanchez on the frame. Sanchez drove while his companion held Glover and kept him from rolling off the frame. Ed Decker and a third Mexican remained in the stack pen.

What dire calamity had happened to Glover? Tom assumed that Glover must

have had an arm painfully smashed by the trip hammer of the baler while inserting a quart bottle.

Hargrove now crept on behind his screen of tumbleweeds toward the creek. He reached the brush and descended through a thicket to the bed of Red River.

Red River he found exactly as described by the depot operator. At this season it was nothing but an insignificant spring branch a yard wide and a few inches deep. Tom stepped across it and ascended the opposite bank to an especially dense copse of wild plums. Here he felt safe. Squatting there, he consumed two of his boiled eggs and took a drink from his canteen.

Then he settled himself to think out a program. Whatever dire stroke of hard luck had befallen Glover, Tom Hargrove was just as determined as ever to secure evidence which would not only put a stop to the Red River liquor traffic but which would restore custody of the property to himself.

While he was pondering the situation he heard a rustling in the brush across creek. Lying quite low and peering out of his own thicket, he saw two men descend the other bank of the creek, obviously to drink from the stream. They were Ed Decker, the broken nosed teamster, and the swarthy Mexican whose job had been to wrangle bales.

In turn they lay belly down on the stream's edge, just below Tom, and drank. They then squatted, conversing a few moments. Decker rolled a cigaret and passed the makings to the Mexican.

"Will Don Adolpho live?" Tom heard the Mexican ask of Decker.

"Live!" echoed Decker. "You couldn't kill Ad Glover with a buzz saw. He's too dang tough. Sanchez and Emilio'll make the down local with him, and they'll have him in the Horton hospital by noon. Trouble was that Ad was in too big a sweat to get done. He was fannin' that machine to double speed. He'd orter known better. Many a time I've told him he'd reach his mitt down that baler once too often. Hello! What the hell's the racket out there?"

Tom heard the same racket. Somebody was running across the meadow, on the stack pen side, bawling for Glover.

"It's that crazy chink!" exclaimed Decker. "Pedro, go see what he's belly-achin' about."

The Mexican climbed the bank and pressed his way through the brush toward the hay meadow. In a few minutes he reappeared with the Chinese cook in tow. Tom, spying from his thicket, could hardly suppress a grin as he saw the grieved expression on the Oriental features, and noted that a long rope of burlap dangled from the cook's wrist.

"What's to pay now?" asked Decker peevishly. He was still squatting by the stream smoking his cigaret.

"Them damn' Melican esclape!" announced the cook. "Him bleakee out clib. Him glone away."

Further report from the cook was interrupted by profane ejaculations from Ed Decker, who, as *segundo*, was now in charge of affairs at the ranch. Indeed, the dangling burlap from the cook's wrist was all the evidence Decker needed to convince him of the prisoner's escape.

"That settles it," he bawled. "Pedro, I ain't goin' to monkey with this baling racket any longer. Ad said that S. P. car had to go out on Red Ball 51 this afternoon, whether it's loaded or not. It ain't loaded and it ain't goin' to be. It's short a hundred bales, but to hell with it! Pedro, you fork a bronc and lope down to the siding. Seal the car and then tell the operator to bill it out on 51, same destination as usual. Me, I'm goin' to load my gun and sit on the layout. Yep, I'm goin' to sit heavy on this here deadfall till I get orders from Ad. Meantime, if that dick comes gumshoein' around here any more he gets bad shotten up. Let's go."

The three men scurried up the bank, disappearing through the brush in the direction of the ranch-house.

ALL THROUGH the day Tom Hargrove kept himself concealed in the plum thicket on the bank of Red River.

The winter's dusk descended at an early evening hour. Tom, peering from the brush, saw lights come on in the ranch-house; he assumed that the present occupants of the house were Ed Decker and the cook. He recalled Decker's promise to "sit on the layout" until he got orders from Glover. Of the four Mexican hands, Tom knew that two had taken Glover to the Horton hospital, one had been later sent to the siding to bill out S. P. car No. 105,469, and the fourth had been engaged during the afternoon in removing broken glass, empty liquor cases and similar evidence from the stack pen.

However, there was still plenty of evidence in that stack pen, and Tom Hargrove meant to get some of it. That morning the crew had turned out about fifty bales and these were piled in a prism five bales high beside the baler. It was certain that each bale contained a quart of liquor. Tom planned to drag two of these bales to the brush and conceal them for further reference.

He waited until it had been quite dark for several hours before tackling this errand. In fact he waited until he saw that all lights were extinguished in the ranch-house. Then he emerged from his thicket and crept cautiously across the strip of meadow toward the stack pen.

The distance, from the nearest point of brush, was not more than a hundred yards. Tom reached the pen and climbed through the barbed wires of its fence. There before him he observed certain dark shapes. One of these was dark, a pile of neat bales, two bales wide, five bales long and five bales high. Then there was the baler itself, a long tunnel of metal whose interior dimensions were exactly the same as those of a bale of hay.

Tom went to the prism of bales and stood on tiptoes for the purpose of pulling down a bale from the top tier. It was then that he observed that one bale had not been tiered at all. It lay on the ground at his feet, or rather at the exit portal of the baler's tunnel. Obviously it was the final one baled at cessation of work.

As this was easily the most convenient bale, Hargrove picked it up and lugged it to the fence. Its weight was about sixty-five pounds. He heaved it over the fence and climbed through after it. He then dragged it a hundred yards to a dense plum thicket on the creek bank.

He wanted two bales. One, by some chance, might not contain a quart bottle, or it might become broken en route to town. So Tom returned to the stack pen for a second bale. He was reaching up to yank a bale from the top tier of the prism when he heard a challenge snarled at him from behind. He whirled to face Ed Decker.

Even in the gloom of night Tom recognized the man by his deformed nose and knobby chin. Decker was coming around a corner of the half despoiled stack of loose hay, tugging at his six-gun. He was hatless and his hair was tousled. Tom realized in a flash that Decker had chosen to sleep all night at the hay pen for the purpose of guarding evidence. Although unawakened by Tom's first invasion of the pen, this second trip had obviously broken the man's sleep.

The light was poor; a circumstance which saved Hargrove from sudden death because Decker began shooting without other parley than a profane challenge.

Decker's .45 boomed and the bullet, missing Tom's cheek scarcely an inch, plowed into the pile of bales at his back. Tom jumped to the left, just as Decker let loose his second shot. Hargrove, unarmed, was at Decker's mercy. Thus he was desperate. At his second jump of retreat he tripped over an object which lay on the ground. Decker, advancing all the while, fired his third shot and again the gloom of night, coupled with Tom's fall, caused a miss.

Then Tom came to his feet, grasping that object over which he had tripped in his hands. It was a three-tined pitchfork. It was the implement with which the

feeder of the baling crew fed loose hay into the maw, and thus lay conveniently on the site. Tom Hargrove, in despairing defense of his life, hurled it with all his might at Decker.

Decker shrieked. His arms flew high and his gun left his hand. He reeled. He staggered forward to his knees. Tom saw that the pitchfork was sticking to his throat by a tine. Decker fell forward heavily. The butt of the fork's handle jabbed against the ground. Decker shrieked again as the tine of steel was forced further through his throat. He struck the ground, writhing. His shrieks became gasps and gurgles. Then he lay quite still.

Witnessing this dreadful sight, a sickening nausea assailed Tom Hargrove. Yet he came forward and stooped over Decker.

He saw that one of the three tines of the fork had spitted the man's windpipe. The tine's point, as sharp as any duelist's blade, protruded red and dripping a full inch from the back of the man's neck. There, on this leaf strewn floor of the baling pen, Hargrove saw Decker expire in his own blood.

Tom, who had never before been the instrument of death, was for a time convulsed with horror, stricken with dire panic. Then he dashed pellmell from the stack pen, cutting himself on the barbed wire of the fence as he tumbled over it. He got up and fled across the meadow at top speed, unmindful of direction. He had run a full mile before he stopped, sweating yet chilled, faint to the point of collapse yet desperate with the impulse to run on and on.

Then suddenly the reaction set in. He pulled himself together. Why run? He began to review facts. These facts cheered him, came as a comfort to his conscience and a sedative to his nerves.

He, Hargrove, was owner of the ranch on Red River. He had stumbled on evidence that his tenant, Glover, was using the property for purpose prejudicial to its dignity and to the owner's repute. He, Hargrove, had both moral and legal right to investigate. In such act of investigation he had been attacked with a gun, fired upon three times, and had merely hurled the fork in desperate self-defense.

Why not go to Horton and state these facts unashamedly to the district attorney? Surely the law would support him, would acquit him of killing Decker. Motives are what count in the meeting of justice, thought Tom. Surely his own had been unassailable. Comforted by these reflections, Tom Hargrove squared his shoulders and set resolutely out in what he knew to be the general direction of Horton, New Mexico.

HE WALKED the night through. It was daylight when he reached the county seat. His appearance, on this cold gray dawn of December, was not such as to inspire the belief that he was Thomas Hargrove of Albany, New York. He was weary and haggard. There was blood on his hands and face, cuts where he had fallen over barbed wire. His clothing, too, was torn by wire and brush; the shabby, dusty, bloodstained denims of a fugitive. To an alien eye, Tom was far more likely to be Joe Armstrong, the out-of-work farm hand who had approached Glover for a job and been hustled from the premises. Nor was there a penny of money in Tom's pockets with which he might have dignified his appearance. The night before last, Glover and Decker had robbed him of his wallet.

Thus Claude Yarrow, district attorney, found him when at eight o'clock he came down to his courthouse office. Tom was waiting dejectedly in the corridor. Yarrow, spick and span in a frock coat, appraised him coldly for a moment and then invited him in.

In the office Yarrow seated himself at a desk. Tom himself sat down across desk, although he received no encouragement to do so from Yarrow. All during Hargrove's recital of his story, which was an exact and true account of events on Red River, the district attorney did not interrupt. His hard poker face hardly changed

expression even when Tom mentioned the death of Decker. But his black, piercing eyes shifted continually about over Tom, from this to that shabby detail of his attire. His arms remained folded on the double breast of his frock coat.

When Tom concluded his recital, Yarrow unfolded his arms. With his left hand he began adjusting his Ascot tie and with his right he smoothed the pompadour of his gray black hair. These were merely gestures of habit. He did not need to employ them because the arrangement of his Ascot and his pompadour were at all times impeccable.

Finally he asked—

"You claim to be Thomas Hargrove of Albany, New York, owner of the ranch on Red River?"

"I do."

Yarrow's lip curled.

"You expect me to believe that?" The sneer was entirely on his lip. His voice was colorless.

"If you do not, I can prove it," responded Tom. But he was already aware that he would get no sympathy from Yarrow.

"How will you prove it?" demanded Yarrow. "What identification do you offer?"

"None," admitted Hargrove with a wry smile. "Decker and his boss, Glover, robbed me night before last of my wallet and suitcase. Yet even in those I had no card of identification, having purposely left them out in order to apprentice myself without prejudice as a ranch hand to Glover."

"You expect me to believe that?" repeated Glover.

"I can bring witnesses from Albany, New York, to identify me," offered Hargrove.

"That will take time," reminded Yarrow. "Meanwhile you are a confessed murderer. By your own story you trespassed under an alias upon the domain of Glover—for a man's lease is his inviolate domain as surely as though he held a warranty deed—and plunged a pitchfork through the throat of a trusted guardian of the premises. I, as district attorney, would profane my oath if I failed to lock you up, arraigning you in due time before judge and jury."

Tom flushed. The phrase "confessed murderer" chilled him.

"But," he cried, "what about this booze racket of Glover's? Do you think I'd let a man rent my ranch and use it for a game like that? Easy proved, too. There are fifty bales in the stack pen now. Each of 'em's got a quart bottle in it. Go out and see for yourself."

"I will without delay," promised Yarrow, "taking the coroner with me. But frankly, I do not credit your charge against Glover. It sounds absurd. I cannot conceive that Adolph Glover would be guilty of such practise. However, I'll investigate. In the meantime—" Yarrow ended his speech in mid-sentence by pressing a buzzer on his desk.

Immediately there appeared from the next office a man of obsequious manner and pale, watery blue eyes whose star proclaimed him county sheriff.

"This fellow has just confessed that he cut Ed Decker's throat, killing him," announced Yarrow.

Tom flinched. So did the sheriff who, blinking his fishy eyes at Hargrove, exclaimed—

"You don't say!"

"Yes. Cut his throat," affirmed the district attorney. "I want him locked up in the capital cell."

The sheriff advanced and took Tom's arm. Yarrow placed himself on the other side of the prisoner, and in this formation the three marched out of the office. The jail was an annex to the courthouse. Hargrove was ushered down a damp corridor to a row of cells, and in the stoutest of these cells he was imprisoned by the sheriff.

After snapping the lock, the sheriff retired to his own office. Yarrow, however, lingered without the grating and Tom, in genuine fright by now, called to him:

"Look here, Yarrow, this is beginning to look pretty raw. What about a lawyer for my defense?"

"You're entitled to one," admitted Yarrow.

"Get me one, then," pleaded Tom.

"Who do you want?"

It occurred to Tom that, inasmuch as he needed some friend from Albany, New York, to identify him, he might as well call upon his own trusted family lawyer, Oliver Q. Dillingham. Dillingham could both identify and defend him.

"I want my own attorney from Albany," announced Tom through the bars to Yarrow. "I demand paper and envelope so that I can write him a letter. You'll even have to furnish the stamp, since Glover stole my wallet."

"You're entitled to paper, envelope and stamp," admitted Yarrow.

He went up the corridor to the jailer's office and in a few minutes returned with a sheet of paper, a pencil and a stamped envelope. These he passed through the bars to Hargrove.

Tom, holding the paper against the cement wall of his cell, wrote a letter to Dillingham. It was brief but explicit. He tersely reviewed facts and requested Dillingham to catch a fast train West to defend him against the charge of murder. He placed the letter in the envelope, sealed it, addressed it very carefully to Dillingham at Albany, and then passed the missive through the bars to Yarrow.

"Mail it," he ordered. "And listen, I'm half inclined to believe you're as crooked as Glover. But you're not a big enough fool to suppress that letter. If you do, Dillingham will himself in time burn you up, prosecuting you for conspiracy."

"I'll mail the letter," promised Yarrow, and left the jail.

YARROW did not return to his own den. Neither did he go directly to the post office to post Hargrove's letter. Instead he went hotfoot to call on Adolph Glover.

Glover, confined to a bed of misery, was at the Horton hospital. Yarrow knew his condition; in fact he had been summoned to his bedside immediately after the two Mexican ranch hands had brought Glover in yesterday afternoon.

"How is he?" Yarrow asked the uniformed nurse whom he met at the ward door.

"He'll pull through," the young lady told him. "But he lost so much blood he's as weak as a newborn kitten. He'll probably be confined here a month. Did you want to see him, Mr. Yarrow?"

"Yes. In private."

"Very well, but don't stay long. And don't let him talk."

"I'll do the talking," promised Yarrow, and entered the ward. The nurse remained in the corridor, leaving the district attorney alone with Glover.

There was nothing remindful of a beet about Glover's face now. It was drawn and white, drawn into lines of excruciating agony. It was ghostlike. Glover lay on his back, staring miserably at the ceiling. A sheet covered him to his neck.

"Don't talk," admonished Yarrow, pulling the skirt of his frock coat back as he seated himself on the bed. "Just listen."

Glover's lips quivered, but he did not speak.

"That fellow you thought was a dick," went on Yarrow, "the one who told you he was Joe Armstrong and asked for a job, is really Thomas Hargrove of Albany, New York, landlord of your ranch. He came sneaking up to the stack pen last night. Ed Decker was asleep there. He woke up and came at Hargrove, shooting. Hargrove killed him with a pitchfork. Hargrove gave himself up and I jugged him. No—no, keep your mouth shut, Glover. I'll talk; you listen."

Glover had only opened his lips to eject a thin and almost soundless curse directed at Hargrove. A spark of hate appeared in the man's pain ridden eyes at mention of Hargrove, or Armstrong, or whoever he was. But for that interloper, from Glover's standpoint, he would not now be lying here helpless, maimed.

"Hargrove will be arraigned," proceeded Yarrow, "for first degree murder before Judge Sam Penrose of Alamogordo,

who is due to hold district court here three weeks from today. There need be no preliminary or previous hearing. Inasmuch as the accused has confessed to killing Decker, I, as district attorney, can logically book him straight to the dock."

At this point Yarrow arose and went to the door to make sure that the nurse was not close by in the corridor. After closing the door he returned to the bed and continued:

"Now listen: Sam Penrose is a square shooter. He's not in our crowd, and will give Hargrove a fair trial. But for the next three weeks we'll have everything our way. Good thing we sent Sanchez back to the ranch last night to break open those fifty bales and ditch the bottles. When the coroner and I investigate this afternoon, we'll find nothing. Not even Decker's gun. The only danger is that Hargrove's lawyer, when he arrives, will get in touch with the railroad and trace the nine cars en route."

"Can't you queer that?" murmured Glover huskily.

"I think so. Hargrove played into my hands. The lawyer he selected lives in Albany, New York. I'm supposed to mail a letter to him. I'll do that—because if I didn't I could be prosecuted for conspiracy. But I'll hold it a week before mailing it. The Albany lawyer will still get here in plenty of time to defend Hargrove in court, but too late to trace the nine cars. Rudolph should have the last one unloaded in ten days at the outside. Now here's the point: Hargrove's entire defense will be based on counter accusations against you. If he proves the hay racket, he'll go free and you're in Dutch. Judge Penrose is a rabid prohibitionist. Nor would any jury blame him for snooping around his own ranch to detect illegal traffic. I'll want you for a witness, Glover. That is, if you're able to get out of bed by that time."

The muscles of Glover's pale face twitched. Again he muttered an almost soundless invective against Hargrove. The outlines of his two outstretched arms could be seen beneath the sheet. Yarrow could tell that they were quivering convulsively, as though the invalid might be clenching fists in impotent rage.

"I'll come to court," Glover promised, "and help convict that sneak, even if I have to come in a wheel chair."

"That's the ticket," agreed Yarrow. "Use a wheel chair whether you need one or not. It will create sympathy from the jury, who will just have heard you maligned by Hargrove."

"What'll I testify?"

"Merely that the accused was a trespasser personally ordered off the premises by you; that he at that time gave the name of Armstrong. Such testimony will cloud his sincerity, as the user of an alias never appears to good advantage. That's all, Glover. Leave everything to me."

TWO WEEKS passed. All that time Tom Hargrove fretted in his cell, awaiting the arrival of Oliver Q. Dillingham from Albany. He saw no more of Yarrow. In fact, he saw no one except a deaf and dumb Mexican deputy jailer who brought him food and water thrice a day.

So for two weeks Tom languished without benefit of counsel. The irony of his plight oppressed his spirit. It seemed to him that conspiracy fairly shrieked at him in ribald mockery through the bars of his cell. Yarrow, he thought, must have suppressed that letter. Finally, in his desperation, Tom even began to hope that Yarrow had suppressed it. Such an indiscretion, he was sure, would injure the prosecution more than the defense. He, Hargrove, could shout the fact aloud in court, to judge, to jury, to the assembled spectators, and demand a new trial with proper preview by his own counsel.

But at the end of two weeks Oliver Q. Dillingham quite suddenly arrived. He reported to his client that he had started immediately after the arrival of the letter. But an examination of the postmark on the letter proved to be merely a blur. Yarrow, the trickster, had accomplished this effect by dampening the spot on the envelope which receives the postmark,

just before mailing it, with a mixture of colorless oil and water. The ink on the postmaster's stamping machine had run this way and that over the dampened spot, leaving only a blur. Thus Yarrow escaped the indictment of conspiracy. And, after all, Dillingham was on hand a week before the trial.

"I'm sorry it happened," apologized Yarrow as he led the Albany attorney to Hargrove's cell. "I can't imagine what could have delayed the letter. The mail crews must have carried it to Albany, Texas, or Albany, Georgia, by mistake."

He left Dillingham with Hargrove. Dillingham, an elderly barrister of erect bearing and prepossessing dignity, a gentleman whose every feature spoke refinement and integrity and yet who was not without ability to detect lack of these attributes in others, looked after Yarrow shrewdly as the district attorney departed down the corridor.

"Do you smell anything?" asked Tom, grinning and overjoyed to see his old friend and patron.

Dillingham's aristocratic nose twitched.

"Perhaps," he admitted. "You infer a conspiracy? Tell me everything, my boy."

Dillingham sat down on the cell cot with a comradely arm around Tom's shoulders. Tom told him the entire story.

When he was done, Dillingham arose briskly.

"I'm two weeks late," he admitted worriedly. "I'll have to work fast. Let me go out and send some telegrams. I'll call again in the morning."

The attorney went out. His first move was to file telegrams to the general freight agents of the Southern Pacific, the Rock Island and the M. K. & T. railroads. He then went to the livery barn and hired a stout buckboard. Cautious inquiry informed him where he could employ three local men of repute, men in no way connected with politics.

Night came and Dillingham drove out of town with his three men in the direction of Red River. The local men knew the country. Dillingham himself had a precise description of that particular plum thicket in which Tom had concealed the bale of hay purloined from the stack pen on the night of Decker's death.

Thus, by leaving the team at the creek bridge of the main highway, Dillingham and his three guides were able to slip up through the brush and take possession of this single bale of hay. They carried it to the buckboard and before dawn were back in Horton.

Disregarding the apparent freakishness of the maneuver, Dillingham had the bale carried up to his own hotel room and deposited upon the floor thereof. He dismissed his three men, locked his room and then sought a few hours' sleep. In the morning he went to the telegraph office to test his luck in that quarter. He had none whatever. Replies from the three general freight agents informed him that all hay cars, billed Glover to Glover, had reached destination and been delivered to consignee.

Thus Dillingham's report to his client, later in the day, was none too optimistic.

"But we've still got that one bale, the one up in your room," reminded Tom. "That'll put the skids under 'em, eh, Mister Dillingham?"

"Not necessarily," deplored the attorney. "Really, my boy, it's a weak exhibit. Now if we could just have sidetracked those nine cars, or even one of them, that would have been perfect. It would have proved the Glovers to be a Border whisky gang, and justified you, as owner, in your nocturnal investigations. I've looked up the character of Judge Penrose, who'll preside at the trial, and he's an upright man. We'll get his entire sympathy the instant we prove the liquor racket. The cars would have been incontestible proof. The one bale in my room is not. Yarrow will claim we planted the bottle there ourselves."

"Did you open the bale to see if it contains a bottle?" asked Tom.

"Naturally not," responded Dillingham. "To tamper with the wires would completely ruin the bale as evidence. It's a weak sister anyway, and its only possible power would be in leaving the wires

intact until broken by the sheriff on the court room floor, squarely within view of judge and jury."

IT WAS Tuesday the fourth of January when the case of the State of New Mexico against Hargrove was called in district court.

There were two oak tables between bench and jury. At one sat Dillingham and Hargrove. The attorney had provided his client with white shirt, white collar and a neat serge suit, so that he might appear to best advantage before the bar of justice.

At the other table sat Yarrow. The district attorney's features seemed more rigidly frozen than ever this morning, the double breast of his frock coat more funereal, and the pompadour of his gray-black hair seemed as stiffly and precisely erect as the spines of a tormented porcupine.

On the bench sat Samuel Penrose of Alamogordo. This jurist was a lean Westerner of stern features and saturnine address. He was an adherent of that political party which opposed Yarrow's.

"And I've just found out," whispered Dillingham to Hargrove, "that he's a puritanic prohibitionist. That's all in our favor."

The morning was consumed by selecting jurymen. Dillingham, unacquainted with any of the candidates, contented himself with challenging all townsmen and accepting all ranchmen. In this he had two motives. Ranchmen would understand and appreciate the mechanism of a hay baler. Also they would be instantly hostile to a competing hay shipper, such as Glover, who had made a practise of shipping alfalfa under conditions of unfair competition to themselves. Freight to mid-West hay markets, Dillingham knew, consumed about half the value of the product. Twenty dollars a ton at the market meant ten dollars at the ranch. What then must be the reaction of competing hay shippers, when they learned that Glover had been shipping hay whose every ton had concealed thirty quarts of liquor?

Thus reasoning, and with his motives entirely unsuspected by Yarrow, Dillingham succeeded in getting a jury of twelve upright ranchmen, hay growers all. Such a program consumed the morning.

Immediately after noon recess District Attorney Claude Yarrow launched his campaign of prosecution.

"I shall prove," he promised, and all through his preamble his voice neither rose nor fell above a colorless monotone, "that Ed Decker came to his death because of being impaled on a pitchfork, hurled at his throat by the accused. I shall further establish that Ed Decker was, at the time of his death, engaged in faithfully defending the premises of his employer. I shall finally prove that the accused had been lurking about these premises since the preceding day, under suspicious circumstances, such as the assumption of a name other than the one he now gives to the clerk of this court.

"Gentlemen, in all the criminal annals of this county we have no record of a crime as bloody and brutal as the one upon which you now sit in solemn judgment. Picture if you will, gentlemen of the jury, a crew of honest ranch folk such as yourselves, toiling from dawn till dark at the arduous labor of baling hay. Invading their peaceful meadow comes a character of disreputable appearance, presenting himself under an alias and ignoring the posted warnings of the estate. Naturally he was ejected.

"Now picture the fiendish revenge pursued by Hargrove, or Armstrong, whichever, if either, is his correct name! For what other motive may we assign than the motive of revenge? Like a thief in the dark of night he again invades the estate, there stabbing the unfortunate Ed Decker to death with the sharp tine of a pitchfork. The State calls as its first witness Coroner Jerome Adams."

The coroner, a beetle browed pigmy with a head several sizes too large for his skinny frame, took the stand and was sworn. He testified that he had called at

the scene of crime the afternoon after its commission, in the company of District Attorney Yarrow. Decker, he declared, lay as he had fallen, the tine of a pitchfork run completely through his neck.

Oliver Q. Dillingham took the coroner for cross-examination.

"Mr. Adams," he quizzed, "in addition to the body did not you also find in the the stack pen a pistol, Decker's habitual weapon, lying on the ground nearby with three empty shells in it?"

"I did not; although, naturally, I searched for such a weapon."

Dillingham exchanged frowns with Hargrove. It appeared that they were trying to establish Decker as an unarmed victim of assault. Truth was that Coroner Adams did not perjure his testimony. Sanchez, an hour before the arrival of the investigators, had removed Decker's gun from the scene of death.

"Very well, Mr. Adams," went on Dillingham. "Did you not observe in the stack pen some fifty bales of hay? And, having already been made aware of certain claims advanced by the accused as to their spurious content, did you not break open one or several of these bales?"

"I found no hay bales in the stack pen, or anywhere else on the ranch," testified Adams. "Therefore I could break none open."

"I have a pleasant surprise for you, then," responded Dillingham cryptically, looking fixedly not at Adams but at Yarrow. "That is all."

Yarrow flinched. His poker face cracked a trifle and he began nervously smoothing at his pompadour. Yarrow naturally did not dream that Dillingham had a bale of hay in his hotel room, an exhibit which the Albany man meant to spring on the jury in the most dramatic manner possible.

The coroner retired.

ONE AT a time Yarrow called to the stand the three Mexicans, Sanchez, Gonzalez and Guttierrez. These testified exactly as previously coached, that the accused had been lurking about the ranch for some time previous to the killing of Decker and that Decker's gun had not been found in the stack pen. On cross-examination they denied all knowledge of a concealment of liquor in hay bales. They professed to have no knowledge of the imprisonment of Hargrove in a grain crib. Dillingham worked an hour on them with no gain whatever.

Next Yarrow called certain Horton citizens, all beneficiaries of Yarrow's county ring, who testified as to the high character and standing of Adolph Glover. Then Yarrow surprised Dillingham by calling as a State witness Hargrove himself.

The bench ruled that the accused did not have to testify at call of prosecution unless he wished, but Dillingham waived the point.

"I should call my client later anyway," said Dillingham. "He has no facts to conceal. Let him speak."

So Hargrove was sworn at the instance of Yarrow. In fact, Tom was Yarrow's most important witness, for Tom had admitted being the instrument of Decker's death.

As Tom faced the court he was flushed and nervous, naturally, as any man, guilty or not guilty, will be when arraigned for murder. Yet his present appearance in many ways defeated the prosecution's charge as to his character: that he had been a tramp, a skulker, a disgruntled bum who had returned to cut a man's throat. He appeared now as a youth from the upper walks of life, clear eyed, refined of feature and prideful of bearing. Yarrow seemed to realize the impression being made by Hargrove; he became cagy in his quizzing, sticking to the facts of Decker's death and the three-tined instrument which had killed him. Hargrove was forced to admit that he had hurled the fork, albeit in self-defense, and that a tine had spitted Decker through the windpipe.

Here Yarrow left him.

But Dillingham jumped in eagerly. Taking the witness, he introduced his entire story.

When Tom mentioned the bottle-in-

bale racket, the jury was seen to hang alertly upon his words. The spectators, composed of some hundred townsmen, cowboys and hay farmers, attended with no less eager an interest. Rumors had been rife that the defense meant to stake its entire case on some colossal bootlegging program which for years had been conducted by the Glovers. When Hargrove stated that he was the owner of the ranch on Red River, that he had caught his tenant in the act of concealing quart bottles in bales of hay, that his intrusion had been merely that of an indignant landlord, the courtroom buzzed with excitement.

All such testimony met vigorous objections from Yarrow, who insisted that it was irrelevant to the murder of Decker and that, moreover, it had no support except the murderer's word.

Judge Penrose ruled that Tom might complete his story, which he did. It was when he mentioned a certain bale, the final bale prepared before Glover's cessation of work, which, he, Hargrove, had dragged to a plum thicket by the creek, that Yarrow's poker face deserted him entirely. He began to worry and fret. His objections became more and more pettish.

The witness was finally released by Dillingham. It was still the State's turn of conduct, and Yarrow used five minutes in a bitter tirade against the accused and his motives. He scoffed at the ridiculous charges made by Hargrove. It merely proved, he alleged, the last desperate ditch to which the defense was forced.

"In all my practise, your Honor, I have never encountered such an absurd cock-and-bull story as the one which has just affronted my ears. Nor will it concern me in the least if the defense actually produces in court a bale of hay which encloses a quart of liquor. Give me a day's warning and I, in any court, yea, even as a stranger in Albany, New York, could, were I so cunning minded, produce a bale of hay in which I had inserted a quart bottle. I warn the defense that such a preposterous exhibit will but earn my contempt, followed by my charge of conspiracy and physical perjury.

"Your Honor, I have but one more witness, Adolph Glover. I regret that Mr. Glover has not yet been able to appear in court. For three weeks he has been confined abed with a most painful injury—an injury inflicted while at work as an industrious and reputable farmer. No doubt due to sheer weakness he has been unable to walk from hospital to court. On the other hand, with proper carriage, he may yet appear. The State therefore craves your Honor for the privilege of calling Mister Glover later should he appear, even though belatedly and out of turn, and under such condition I resign the floor to the defense."

THERE being no objection by Dillingham, the request was granted. Dillingham took the floor subject to relinquishing it to Yarrow, should Glover appear.

"I request to be sworn myself," began Dillingham.

Dillingham was sworn as his own witness. In such capacity he identified Thomas Hargrove of Albany, New York, in forceful terms. Inasmuch as the prosecution had seen fit to cloud this identity, Dillingham even eulogized his client as a model and honest citizen of his home town.

". . . whose very modesty," he went on, "inspired him to conceal the fact that he was landlord of the ranch on which he sought work, that he might educate his hand and mind to Western methods. A braggart or a coward or a fop would have come strutting importantly to Red River, demanding a favored position on his own estate. Not so my friend, Tom Hargrove."

Dropping the rôle of witness, Dillingham turned suddenly to the bench and stated that he wished to produce his Exhibit A.

"It's a bale of alfalfa, your Honor, the product of Glover's baler and a proof of Glover's felony. It lies, still bound by the wires which originally compressed it, on

the floor of my hotel room. Here is the key, and I request that the sheriff and constable immediately bring the bale to court."

Yarrow was on his feet with an objection. Judge Penrose, however, was moved to admit the exhibit.

"The defense has the right of exhibits," he ruled. "Let the jury see this bale and ponder its merit as evidence."

The sheriff and constable took the key to Dillingham's room and left court.

Dillingham then produced a lease, a copy of the lease by which Glover had occupied the ranch on Red River, and from this lease he had the clerk of the court read aloud a vital paragraph.

". . . For agricultural purposes only", was the phrase which Dillingham brought to the jury's attention.

"Illicit traffic in Border whisky is not an agricultural purpose," summed up Dillingham. "Glover therefore violated his own lease, leaving the property wide open for the owner's intervention. Morally, it was Glover who was trespasser, and not Hargrove. My Exhibit A, a bale of hay, will establish that fact before your eyes."

"Again I object," cried Yarrow, leaping to his feet. His mask was gone. His voice, usually a monotone, was now choked with rage and arose shrilly as he amplified his objection. "The State even admits that there will be a quart bottle in the bale when opened in court. Bah! It was planted there by these perjurous slanderers from the East. They dare come into the clean open ozone of the West, impugning our morals, branding us as felons feeding on trickery and chicane."

Tom Hargrove sprang to his feet, flushing with resentment, but was pulled to his seat by a deputy from the jail. No such restraint was upon Oliver Q. Dillingham, who now for the first time in a career of exemplary dignity lost his temper in court. The Albany attorney, not used to being accused of physical perjury, advanced to Yarrow and shook a fist in the district attorney's face.

"You lie," he shouted. "You're a disgrace to the Bar. You're up to your neck in this Border booze racket with Glover, and—"

Rap-rap-rap! Penrose was pounding sternly with his gavel. Not entirely at the bickering attorneys but also at the general uproar. The assembled spectators, whose sympathies had caught fire one way or the other, were yelping, cheering, catcalling, producing all manner of hubbub in court. The situation almost got away from Penrose. Sergeants-at-arms he had none; for both sheriff and constable were absent on the errand to Dillingham's room.

Quiet was finally induced by the sudden return of these officials. They entered at the west door, portering a bale of hay. There was, however, another and simultaneous entry at the east door. A man sitting in a rolling chair was wheeled in by two hospital attendants. He was of giant stature, albeit now pale and sunken of cheeks. His head stuck out almost horizontally forward from hunched shoulders. His left hand, gross and hairy, lay on his knee. His right arm was in a sling.

The sheriff and constable placed the bale of hay on the oak table in front of Dillingham. Sight of it brought a hush to the courtroom. Dillingham sat down. So did Yarrow.

At this juncture Judge Samuel Penrose spoke from the bench.

"The bickering of the past moments is inexcusable," he said, "and a serious affront to my court. But since each side was equally guilty I will invoke no fines unless it occurs again. Now, as to the admissibility of the bale of hay as an exhibit. I feel it my duty to charge the jury not to take it too seriously. There may or may not be a quart bottle of liquor concealed within the bale. If not, the exhibit is nil. If it is, it merely proves that someone, Glover or some ill wisher of Glover's, inserted the bottle therein.

"But on one certain phase of the matter there is not a single legal cobweb clouding my mind. Hark ye, gentlemen of the jury, to a considered opinion from this

bench of justice. If this bale of hay develops incontestible proof that Glover was misusing an agricultural lease for the purpose of shipping liquor in hay, then the owner of the property, the accused in this murder trial, had an honorable motive in approaching the stack pen for evidence; in fact, such an act was his duty both to himself and to the State. Hark ye to that opinion. But I observe that Mr. Glover has now appeared in court. According to previous agreement, the prosecution may call him as a witness."

Yarrow, his temper still on edge, arose and called Glover. Glover was wheeled to a position in front of the bench. It was now plain to all observers that Glover was not paralyzed, as might have been presumed from the wheel chair. He was pallid and under weight, as a result of confinement and loss of blood. Evidently the wheel chair had been used for his transport merely because he had been called from his bed before the completion of his convalescence. The exact nature of his malady was now apparent to all. From the sling which supported his right arm there extended, in plain view of the court, the freshly healed stub of a wrist.

Tom Hargrove, after gazing with mingled curiosity and pity at this stub of wrist, raised his eyes and met Glover's. Glover flashed him a scowl of satanic hate. His head, extended as it was from hunched shoulders, gave him something of the appearance of a huge serpent about to strike at Hargrove.

Yarrow had the witness sworn. He then asked but three questions:

"Is the accused at bar a recent trespasser, ejected from your lease on Red River? . . . Did he give the name of Joe Armstrong? . . . Did you, Mr. Glover, ever in your life conceal a bottle of any liquid in a hay bale?"

To the first two questions Glover answered, yes, to the third, no. But to the annoyance of Yarrow, the witness roared the replies in bellicose tone directly at Hargrove. Three weeks' convalescence seemed to have restored the vigor of his throat muscles. This somewhat nullified Yarrow's strategy, which had been to produce an invalid defamed by the defense, and thus induce sympathy from the jury. But the three monosyllables bellowed by Glover produced an impression that Glover really did not need the wheel chair.

Dillingham waived cross-examination.

"And now, your Honor," resumed the Albany attorney, "this interlude in my case having transpired, I request the sheriff to cut the three steel wires which bind this bale of hay, our exhibit."

Snip! Snip! Snip! The sheriff cut the three wires which compressed the bale of hay. Pressure released, the hay spurted this way and that, some falling on the floor, the rest spreading in a mattress over the top of the defense table.

Every man in court, not excluding the judge, arose and craned his neck to see whether or not the bursting of the bale of hay had exposed a quart bottle. It had. There lay the bottle, corked and filled with some reddish fluid, in plain view.

It was not the bottle, however, which shocked every nerve in the room, which bated every human breath and suspended the vibration of every heart. It was not Exhibit A, the quart bottle. Puny indeed was that exhibit beside its amazing complement, Exhibit B. There they lay, the two of them, the one athwart the other.

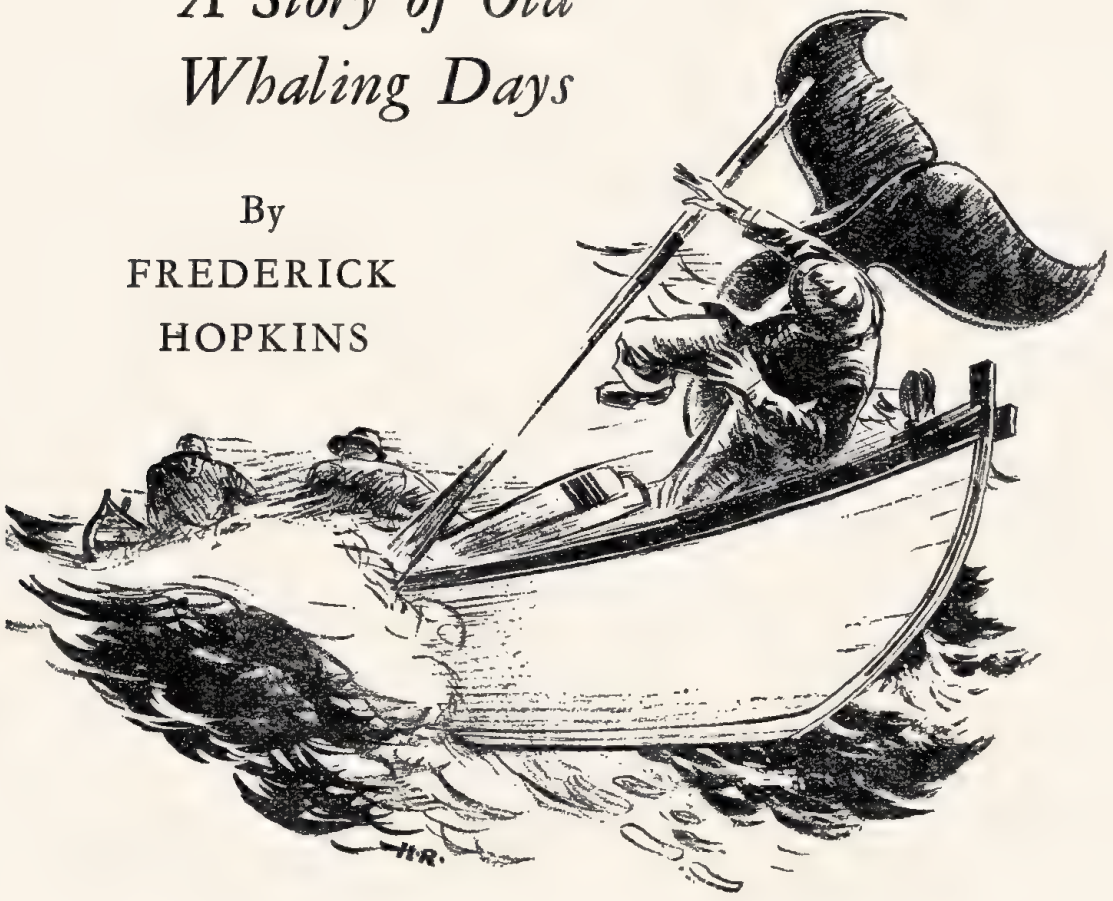
The State was swamped. Here, in mid-trial, justice triumphed with a bang. Yarrow slumped in his seat, as limp as a bartender's wiper on a prosperous Saturday night. Who now but Adolph Glover could have inserted bottle in bale?

There lay the bottle. There lay its co-exhibit, athwart its amber neck. The judge stared, pop-eyed. The jury stared, twelve heads with but a single eye, twelve minds leaping in unison to one conviction of truth. Even Dillingham stared, for he had expected no such luck as this. All stared but Glover, who shrank into the cushions of his wheel chair and shrieked aloud. For that which had popped from this green bale, the last hay ever baled on Red River, was a thing of hairs and dead flesh. It was an exhibit of compelling potence—a human hand, Glover's.

The SCRIMSHAW

A Story of Old Whaling Days

By
FREDERICK
HOPKINS



A NEW BEDFORD taxicab swung around the corner from Water Street into William, climbed the hill and drew up at the entrance of a two story brick building on the north side of the street. The driver reached around and opened the door, and from the cab emerged its single passenger—a youngish woman, carrying in her hand a small package wrapped in brown paper.

"This is the place," remarked the driver, as he banged the cab door shut.

The woman looked upward in the direction indicated by the driver's nod. From two windows in the second story of the building two bearded men were gazing down at her.

"That's him," said the driver. "The one with the white beard. Thirty cents."

She handed him a half-dollar, entered the doorway and ran up the wooden stairs. At the top, immediately at her right, appeared an office door which bore upon its opaque glass the legend:

BIGGS AND RODNEY
MARINE INSURANCE

She rapped.

"Come in," answered two bass voices, in chorus.

She opened the door and entered.

At two desks, sidewise to the windows, sat two elderly men facing each other.

The elder of the two was a rugged and heavy man, with broad shoulders and chest, looming big above his flat topped desk. His keen eyes twinkled and his mouth, under the shaven upper lip, showed a humorous softening of its stern outlines. His complexion was ruddy, his white beard trimmed short, and his scalp showed pink through his sparse white hair.

His companion of the opposite desk was a younger man, carrying less weight, but also heavily built—a weather beaten, active man of seventy and more, with brown hair and beard.

"Captain Biggs?" inquired the visitor, the "t" distinctly pronounced.

"Yes, ma'am," replied he of the white beard.

"I am Mrs. Favor, of Kansas City."

"Glad to meet you, ma'am. This is Cap'n Peleg Rodney, my partner."

She bowed.

"I really must explain. We motored east from Kansas City. My little boy had never seen the ocean. We're stopping over in New Bedford on our way to Martha's Vineyard. I'm so glad to meet some real sea captains. But I always imagined them as such stern, fierce men!"

"Don't we look that way, ma'am? Some of the worst of us look the meekest. You can't go by that. Why, there was Cap'n Touper—mildest lookin' man you ever set your eyes on. Terrible cruel to his crew. Had one man scrubbed with a brick and washed with lye every day till the man went crazy and died— No, we're a good deal worse'n we look."

"Oh, Captain, is it possible!"

"She got you that time, Shubael," observed Captain Rodney.

"Of course I didn't mean that," the visitor hastened to say. "I just meant that Captain Biggs seems so genial. I can't imagine him severe. I doubt if he even swears. And sea captains have the reputation of being so profane."

"I can do pretty well when I get goin'. But the mates do most of the swearin'. That's what they're hired for. The song says:

"The cooper at his vise bench is makin' iron poles,
And the mate on the main hatch is cursin' all our souls."

She laughed.

"Profanity seems picturesque when one doesn't have to listen to it. But I mustn't forget what I came for."

She began to unwrap her bundle.

"We stopped in at that old curiosity shop right around the corner—"

"On Water street. Yes, ma'am."

"My husband and my little boy are still there. I'm to meet them later. We were told by the man in charge that you might be able to tell me something about —about a whale."

"Likely I can. Yes, ma'am. Take a chair. What's the question?"

SHE SEATED herself and finished the unwrapping. And now was disclosed a mechanism consisting of a small ivory wheel connected by ivory bars with the image of a large black and white fish, the whole thing covered with incised ornament in red, blue and black representing whaling scenes. She handed it to Captain Biggs.

"The man said you could tell us about it. It's so quaint! I love to pick up things this way. I'm devoted to the quaint."

The captain took it carefully from her hands and examined it closely.

"A fine piece of scrimshaw work," he remarked at length. "Have a look at it, Peleg."

Captain Rodney reached across the desks, took the object, examined it carefully and returned it to Captain Biggs.

"Some poor Jack spent many a long hour at that," he observed.

"What kind of work did you say, Captain Biggs?" Mrs. Favor inquired. "I didn't quite catch the word."

"A scrimshaw. Something the sailors make out of whale ivory in their spare

time on board ship. When they get home they sell 'em, or give 'em away. Or maybe they dispose of 'em at some port where they touch."

"Just imagine! What is it for?"

"This particular scrimshaw's a jaggin' wheel. That's what most of 'em are. You see this little ivory wheel with the zigzag edge. That's for crimpin' pies. It makes a line round the edge of the pie crust. And the fish is a handle to hold it by while you crimp the pie. Seems kind o' foolish, don't it, Peleg? Those focsle Jacks make so many jaggin' wheels. I s'pose the salt horse and ship's bread makes the ignorant sojers think of pie."

"For a jaggin' wheel, this is extra good," commented Captain Rodney.

"So 'tis. See, ma'am. The fish is cut out of a sparm whale's tooth. The black is whalebone from a right whale, heated and twisted and bent on with wire, and glued. These spots over the eyes are mother-of-pearl inlay, cut from a shell. And the wheel and all the white parts are white bone from the broad pan of the jaw of a young sparm whale. That's the finest, whitest bone . . . He made a good job of old hook-fin, eh, Peleg?"

"Old what, Captain?" inquired the visitor.

"Hook-fin, I said. A killer. Very nat'ral copy. Looks jist like 'em."

"Why, I thought he told me it was a whale."

"So 'tis, ma'am. The fish is a killer. A killer whale. Probably you ain't familiar with 'em. A kind of a whale, smaller size, twenty or thirty foot long."

"Most fee-rocious fish that swims," Captain Rodney added.

"Hunts the larger whales," Captain Biggs went on. "Sticks his head inside the big whale's mouth, pries it open and eats his great tongue. Hangs to him like a bulldog."

"Oh, Captain!" exclaimed Mrs. Favor. "How awful!"

"You'd say so, ma'am, if you saw his noodle-end a-comin' up through a crack in the thin ice where he'd bumped off the young Ooksook seals into the water so's he could get at 'em."

"Oh, Captain Biggs, have you actually seen them?"

"I've seen 'em several times. They ain't confined to the Ar'tic. They're in practically every ocean."

"I suppose, Shubael," remarked Captain Rodney, "that when he sent this lady here from the antique store, 't he had in mind that v'y'ge of yours in the *Luella West*."

"Likely he did. Yes, ma'am, Cap'n Rodney is referrin' to one o' my early v'y'ges where we had consid'able experience with killers. The ship was the *Luella West*. 'Twas a good many years ago. The story's well known hereabouts, but I guess likely you ain't heard it."

"No, I haven't, Captain Biggs, but I'd love to. I know it's thrilling!"

Captain Biggs cleared his throat.

"I'd be glad to tell it, but it ain't short. Perhaps you ain't got the time."

"Oh, I have an abundance of time. And I'd be so interested! But I ought not to take you from your business."

"Don't you bother 'bout that, ma'am. Cap'n Rodney and me, we have this little office more for a place to pass the time than anything. All the insurance we place don't amount to much. We're practically ree-tired. Far's I'm concerned there's plenty of time."

"Then do tell it!"

"Well, I will . . . Peleg, what do you think of the practise of a Cap'n takin' his wife with him on a v'y'ge? It used to be done more'n 'tis now. Would you sign shippin' papers if you knew it?"

"I would not. Not that I'm superstitious. I ain't. But I never knew good to come of a woman aboard ship."

"Most seafarin' men think that way. I've beat the wash for more'n forty years, and I think so too. 'Tain't a matter of superstition—it's common sense. Now with the *Luella West* likely everything would have been all right if Mrs. Reynolds hadn't gone along."

"And she a fine woman, as I've been informed."

"Good as the best, but that ain't the p'int. For instance, take you or me—we think about our wives and families at proper times. But they ain't there to bother us every time the boats are lowered, tellin' us to be careful. I wouldn't feel free. Why, I've had the buttons all bit off my shirt by whales and thought nothin' of it. S'pose a woman had been there!"

"Moreover," added Captain Rodney, "after a month out the foremast hands are a rough, ragged and saucy lot. The officers are none too fine. Are they goin' to keep dressed up for a woman?" His shoulders shrugged his answer.

"Well, then, Peleg," said Captain Biggs, "suppose you were shipped and aboard and hauled into the stream. The cap'n comes, bringin' his wife. Would you refuse to sail?"

"I think it would be splendid to have a woman on the ship," Mrs. Favor interposed. "So helpful to the moral atmosphere. But if the men do object, why not go all together to the captain and discuss the matter? He'd be glad to know just how the sailors felt."

"He'd give 'em a pirate's blessing," said Captain Biggs. "And he'd tell 'em how *he* felt."

Mrs. Favor smiled.

"What's a pirate's blessing?"

Captain Biggs regarded her kindly.

"I'd hate to have you hear one, ma'am."

"Under the circumstances you name, Shubael," said Captain Rodney doubtfully, "I suppose I'd sail, same as you did. But I'd have my misgivin's."

"Woman's sphere is constantly enlarging," observed Mrs. Favor. "But possibly there may be objections to a whale ship."

"I'll say so, ma'am," Captain Biggs agreed . . . Well, let—me—see. This v'y'ge of the *Luella West*—I s'pose the best way is to begin at the beginnin'. Correct me, Peleg, if I mis-state."

And clearing his throat, Captain Biggs sat back in his chair, and began the promised story.

"IT WAS the twenty-ninth of October when the ship *Luella West*, Cap'n John Reynolds, was hauled into the stream, bound for the South Seas and North Pacific, and outfitted for three or four years. We had hauled out from the New Bedford dock early in the morning, and though most of the crew were coming later, the most experienced of the foremast Jacks came early, so's to pick out the best bunks in the focsle, get their sea-chests fast to the cleats, and so on.

"The only officer in sight was the second mate, a young man named Biggs, of a New Bedford family that has sent out many a good mariner, if I do say it. This was to be my second whalin' v'y'ge. My first v'y'ge had been for sparm, in the warm oceans. This time we were after right as well as sparm, and would likely reach the Ar'tic. Which was what I wanted, for I was after experience.

"Well, this mornin' I looked the vessel over very careful, and then, there bein' nothin' else to do, I walked for'ard to where some of the foremast hands were leanin' against the rail, havin' got their sea-chests stowed and wearin' their sea clothes of bull's wool and dog's hair. And first thing, who should I see but Asaph Dyer!

"Now Asaph was well known among the whalemen as a ree-markable harpooneer, and one of the best far-dart men that ever filled up on gunpowder and rum. But you'd never guess it to look at him. He was a smallish, slender man with a weak face and a watery eye and big hands tanned the color of saffron. When he was wearin' his party clothes his shoestrings trailed on the ground and his red flannel drawers showed under his short pants. Soon 's I set my eye on Asaph I made up my mind I'd get him for my boatsteerer when it come to choosin' crews.

"He was standin' up alongside of a Portagee by the name of Manuel Sousa. I knew him too. I never favored the Ghees, though there's some good ones. They can do just so much and there they

stop. Tell a Ghee what to do, and if it don't involve too much thinkin' he'll do it—if you're there to make him.

"So I spoke to 'em, pleasant. And Asaph says—

" 'Mr. Biggs, have you heard the news about Cap'n Reynolds?'

"I says:

" 'No, Asaph. What about it?'

" 'Why,' he says, 'our pussy blacksmith tells me the cap'n is cal'latin' to bring his wife with him on this v'y'ge.'

" 'Sho, Asaph,' I says, 'I ain't heard anything of the kind.'

" 'What would you do in that case, Mr. Biggs?' inquires Asaph.

" 'I should stay on the ship,' I says. 'I signed the articles, and I'll stand by 'em.'

" 'I s'pose that's the only thing to do,' says Asaph, 'though I wish I was ashore. Well, we'll soon know.'

"The amount of it was that the tug come off pretty soon with the rest of the officers and crew and the owners and agents and so on. And sure enough, there she was, with the cap'n. We knew it was her.

"So everybody come aboard, and the anchor was heaved up, and soon 's we were well under way in tow, a boy come to find me, sayin' the cap'n wished to see the ship's officers in the cabin. 'Cordin'ly I walked aft to the cap'n's quarters.

"There was Cap'n Reynolds standin' by his desk, with Mrs. Reynolds sittin' in a chair. Also in the cabin were the first and third mates, standin' up.

"The first mate was Philip de Roza, a Portagee from the Western Islands, a strong built, stocky man. However he got his berth as first mate I never knew, though he was an experienced whaleman and could navigate a little. But he wa'n't popular with anybody, and he wa'n't any too familiar with the English language, outside of the ordinary things 't a mate has to say. But his record was good, for a Ghee.

"Third mate was Henry Gartner, nice young fellow from Kennebunkport, Maine. Second mate, myself.

"So Cap'n Reynolds begun his talk.

" 'Before it is too late,' he says, 'let us settle this question. Mrs. Reynolds is here with me.'

"She bowed to us, very pleasant, and we bowed back.

" 'Mrs. Reynolds will make the v'y'ge with us,' says the cap'n. 'That is decided between the owners and myself, and it's nobody else's business. But to avoid all misunderstanding, I will ask you three officers if any one of you objects to sailing. If so, you have the privilege of going back in the tug, and I will personally assume all charges against you on the books in connection with this v'y'ge.'

"Now Cap'n Reynolds was a man of few words, and strict. But he was thought to be fair, and he'd always come home with a full ship. So we looked at each other, nobody talkin', till Mrs. Reynolds, she spoke up.

" 'It is only natural that you gentlemen should want to know something of me if I'm to be your companion for some years. I'm a school teacher.'

"Well, we knew that. He'd been courtin' her for a number of years, but they'd only just got married. And we were all New Bedford men, while they lived in South Dartmouth. She was a good lookin', pleasant spoken young woman, and the upshot was that when she got through talkin', I up and said we'd all be very glad if she'd come along. And so it was understood."

"I DON'T know, Peleg," remarked Captain Biggs, pausing at this point, "but the worst luck I'd wish any man would be to have a handsome wife."

Captain Rodney chewed once or twice, expectorated into the receptacle at his side, and coughed.

"Seems to me you were always rather partial to a good lookin' woman, Shubael. And Mrs. Biggs—"

"He said handsome," Mrs. Favor interrupted. "There's a considerable difference."

"Besides," added Captain Biggs, "most

any woman would look handsome on a whale ship. And Mrs. Reynolds was right good lookin'."

Captain Rodney nodded.

"I've heard say so."

"She was . . . Well, no great harm come of her bein' aboard, not for some time. We made the run to the Azores in about three weeks, and anchored in the harbor of Fayal. When we were finally goin' to up anchor and they'd manned the windlass—I just tell you this to show what a difference a little thing can make—while they were a-heavin' on the windlass, 'long comes the first mate, this Philip de Roza, and he says, 'Heave away, sojers!' and in passin' he gives one of the men a kick.

"Now the man he gives this kick to was a very black Kanaka from Roratonga, of the Society Islands. And soon's he felt the kick, he stopped heavin' and he grabbed the knife he carried in his belt, and he stood up, a very tall, fine lookin' black man. If he'd been kicked by a white man 'tain't likely he'd done anything—but a white man wouldn't kicked him. But to be kicked by a Portagee! So probably he'd have cut the first mate, but the first mate walked away. And one of the crew struck up:

> " 'Heave 'im up! O he yo!
> Butter and cheese for breakfast!'

"And the others j'ined in:

> " 'Heave away! O he yo!
> Duff for dinner, duff for dinner!'

"And so the matter passed off for the time bein'.

"We made the Cape Verde Islands December fourth, and sailed south, cruising for sparm. But whales were scarce, and it was off Tristan d'Acunha that we got our first whale, ninety days out.

"The masthead raised a small pod of whales, and we lowered. My boat went after the biggest, a fair sized bull, but before we could reach him, he sank—sounded—and so did the rest. There was nothin' to do but lay still and wait for 'em to come up again.

"Which they did, but not all together. The cows and young ones first, and 'twas a good hour and more before this old bull whale he rolls up over the water. And there he lays, a-lookin' at us, large and saucy.

"We went as close to him as was safe, and Asaph got both irons in. Then we hauled up, and I lanced, and in due time he was fins out, head to the sun. He made ninety bar'ls. But what I'm gettin' at is this: After his flurry the water was covered with big chunks of squid, some of 'em big as a hogshead. He'd throwed 'em up in his flurry. He'd been down to the bottom, feedin', in that last hour 'n' more . . . I s'pose you've seen the same thing, Peleg."

"More'n once."

"Shows you what size the squid is, when the whale bites out pieces size of a hogshead. I've read that the giant squid is the largest animal that inhabits the seas."

"Must be a terrible big fish," remarked Captain Rodney. "I never heard of anybody 't had act'ally seen one—anybody 't you could depend on. Must be a great fight, if you could see it."

"The squid ain't got a chance with a sparm whale," said Captain Biggs. "Now let me tell you my idee. The squid is a-hidin' at the bottom of the ocean, maybe three mile down, with big pale body against a rock and his saucer eyes lookin' in every direction, and his great long arms, thirty foot long, some of 'em, twistin' and writhin' every which way. And first thing he knows, he sees a big sparm whale, big and black's a mountain, p'inted down at him and a-comin' his way. The squid is scared and he sends out his arms and feels all over the whale, tryin' to get a hold. But the whale is smooth and greasy, and the suckers don't take hold."

" 'Twouldn't make any difference if they did," Captain Rodney observed. "The squid ain't got strength enough to squeeze a whale. The sparm whale's all sheathed with thick blubber, and his brain pan is cushioned with junk and

case, strong as a trestle bridge and full of ile. He's springy as a rubber ball. The whole ocean's a-pressin' down on him, and it don't hurt him none."

" 'Twould be hard to hurt him that way," said Captain Biggs. "And he can see probably better under water than out of it. His eye's small so's not to be hurt by the deep water. So's his ear. They say the ocean's dark. I don't know. Must be some light somewheres. The squid's light in color."

"They do say," Captain Rodney interposed, "that there's a kind of light from the fishes that swim in the deep sea."

"Maybe so," Captain Biggs agreed. "The inside of the sparm whale's mouth is a silvery white. So's his tongue . . . Now, 'long he comes, a-pushin' and a-buttin' with his big head that is all sinew and ain't got any blood or any feelin' in it. And the squid, he opens his hard parrot beak and tries to bite the whale on his tough head. But he don't make any impression. The whale don't even feel it, and he keeps on a-buttin' against the squid and a-drivin' him back against the rock.

"So when the sparm whale's ready, he lowers that sharp, narrow jaw of his down from the groove in the head, and the white inside of his mouth reflects any light there is, right down on the squid. And up comes that narrow lower jaw, cuttin' out a hunk of squid just like a knife. Then it's goodby squid."

"You get all this, do you, ma'am?" inquired Captain Rodney of the visitor, who had been listening intently.

"I believe so," she answered thoughtfully. "There may be one or two little points . . . What's a sparm?"

CAPTAIN RODNEY expectorated once more and wiped his mouth with his hand.

"Sparm whale. Gives the sparm ile. Same kind we've been talkin' 'bout."

"I ain't see anything like this in print," Captain Biggs continued. "It's just my idee. It don't always allow a great deal of time for the whale to feed. Sometimes he may have to go down three miles, and I figure he'll go down those three miles in twenty minutes. Give him an hour under water after he sounds. That allows him twenty minutes to feed, and twenty more to swim up. Of course the cows can't go down quite so far."

"I think you have the right idee, Shubael," said Captain Rodney. "I never give it so much thought before, but I don't see any argument against it."

"I ain't gettin' on very fast with the story of this v'y'ge, seems to me," observed Captain Biggs. "Let's see. We were somewhere's near Tristan d'Acunha. We cruised there a while longer, takin' some ile. Then we rounded the Horn in the southern summer and ran into gales in the South Pacific. There we got our first right whale. From there we run north to the Chile off-shore grounds, got ile there, sighted the Galapagos Islands, and on the first of May, five months out, entered the port of Hilo, Hawaii. There we stayed two weeks, breakin' out some of our cargo of ile for shipment home and fittin' and recruitin' for the Ar'tic . . . Now we're travelin' fast, ain't we?"

Mrs. Favor laughed.

"It's just as well. I'm afraid all those names don't mean much to me. I must look at the map."

"Well," said Captain Biggs, "now we're at Honolulu. That starts us fresh. From there we're sailin' northerly for the Straits and the Sea of Kamchatka. And while we're on our way, I'm a-goin' to say somethin' about the captain's wife and the Portagee first mate.

"You remember 't I said the Portagee didn't speak English none too well. And 'twas quite frequent that he wouldn't rightly understand what was said to him. So Mrs. Reynolds, out of the kindness of her heart, I s'pose, offered to teach him. It come natural, probably, she bein' a school teacher. And she wouldn't done it without askin' Captain Reynolds. He would say yes, they bein' such a short time married. So once a week what does the Portagee do but he goes to the cap'n's

cabin and he has a lesson in the English language.

"Ought to known better," observed Captain Rodney.

"And when that Portagee come out of the cabin after one of those lessons! By Godfrey! You'd thought he owned the ship . . . I remember one day we were cruisin'. Light breeze and the men for'ard on deck passin' the time. The first mate come out from the cabin, havin' had his weekly lesson. And this rowdy bunch of Jacks, they made all manner of fun of him, pretendin' he was cap'n. 'Cap'n Bunker,' they'd sing out. 'Oh, Cap'n Bunker!' "

"Who was Captain Bunker?" inquired Mrs. Favor.

"It's the name of a song, ma'am. Just a focsle song. It goes, 'Lay me on, Captain Bunker! I'm hell for a long dart!' Excuse me, ma'am, the song says that. Well, the mate knew the Jacks called him Cap'n Bunker in disrespec', and he sees the Roratonga Kanaka grinnin' so's all his teeth showed. So he grabs him by the collar, and he says—

" 'You black Kanaka, you go below and you stay below till your watch is called, or I'll have you skinned alive!'

"And the Kanaka took it all right, the joke bein' on the mate, and he went below as he was told.

"One day, 'long towards noon, we raised sparm. We reached our boats to lower, but the first mate, he was late reachin' his boat. When he finally come along, Cap'n Reynolds says to him—

" 'Where have you been, Mr. de Roza?'

" 'Havin' my lesson,' answers the Ghee.

" 'You've had your last lesson, Mr. de Roza,' says the Cap'n. 'The last. There'll be no more. Get into your boat.'

"So the Ghee slid down the falls, lookin' very sore.

"OUT OF this pod of whales we got one, a cow. 'Twas Asaph put the irons in. I had a very good boat at the time. The Roratonga Kanaka rowed in my boat, pullin' a very strong oar. And among the men taken on at Hilo were two more Kanakas from different places, and they also were in my boat. So that I had three Kanakas in the boat, includin' the man from Roratonga. Which I did not object to, as they were all experienced whalemen, and very prompt to obey orders.

"While we were busy gettin' the cow, the waist boat was stove by a bull whale they struck. The other boats picked up the men, and when we towed the cow whale we took along the stoven boat, floatin' awash, and made it fast astern of the ship till we should get the whale cut in.

"We cut in this cow quick, tryin' to have it done by daylight. She went into the fluke chains; then it was, 'Haul taut and heave!' and pretty soon the last piece of blubber was hove in and the cutters-in were back on the ship, roarin', 'Five and forty more!' "

" 'Five and forty what?' inquired Mrs. Favor.

" 'Bar'ls, ma'am. So I suppose. They always roar it out soon 's the blanket piece is hove in. I judge a blanket piece will average to make forty-five bar'ls. And after bringin' in his old head, the oldtime cap'ns served each man a drink of rum. Cap'n Reynolds did, but the tin cup was small. While they were a-drinkin' of it, they'd sing:

> " 'Oh, whisky is the life of man,
> Oh, whisky! Oh, Johnny!' "

"How characteristic!"

"Very popular chantey, ma'am . . . Well, goin' back to the cuttin'-in. The Portagee first mate was standin' in the waist near the cuttin' stage, and he didn't like the way one of the cutters-in was handlin' his spade. This kind o' bothered the man, for the Portagee was hollerin' all kinds of directions which he didn't understand. Cap'n Reynolds steps over, sees what's the matter, and he says:

" 'Mr. de Roza, let the man handle his spade his own way. It suits me.'

"At that the Portagee gets very red, and he says—

" 'Don't you think I know how to use a spade, Cap'n Reynolds?' And Cap'n Reynolds says—

" 'No, I don't think you do.'

"So the Portagee gets excited and begins talkin' to himself.

"Now you understand, ma'am, that when they're cuttin'-in a whale, the deck is all greasy and slippery, covered with pieces of blubber, so you can't hardly step. At this time Mrs. Reynolds was standin' aft, between the deckhouses, watchin'. And the cap'n was pickin' his way along the deck, goin' to where she was. It was most dark. There was a big blaze from the try works, and the smoke was risin' heavy into the air. The whale's carcass had been turned adrift, and there it was, way astern, with the sharks all round it and the gulls screamin' over it. And Cap'n Reynolds, as I was sayin', was comin' aft t'ward the deck-houses.

"When all of a sudden, who should come up in front of him but the first mate, risin' up from nowhere, with a cuttin' spade in his hand—and the cuttin' spades, they're ground down very fine and sharp. And the mate, red in the face, and wavin' the cuttin' spade, he hollers:

" 'You, Cap'n Reynolds, you say I don't know how to use a cuttin' spade? I show you how I use it! I show you how I use a cuttin' spade!'

"With that, he makes a move to strike the cap'n with the spade. Cap'n Reynolds looks round to pick up somethin', but there's nothin' he can reach, only the deck slippery with blubber. He looks at the mate, but the Portagee's so excited he's practically crazy. Anybody would see it. Cap'n Reynolds saw it and he kept backin' t'wards the rail, and when he reached the rail and the Portagee still a-comin', the cap'n put his hand on the rail and he jumped overboard.

"When the cap'n's wife saw him go overboard, she let out one long, loud screech. Then she run to the rail, to the part where he jumped over, and she looked over the rail into the water, and she climbed up on the rail and she jumped into the water after him.

"It took some time for us to realize what was goin' on, but soon's we heard the scream and saw her jump, we ran and lowered like as if we were lowerin' for whale. But by this time 'twas dark, and the light from the try works made the water darker. So we s'arched and we s'arched and we couldn't find 'em. We kept the boats rowin' back and forth all night, and when daylight come we hadn't made the least progress t'wards findin' 'em.

"However, the waist boat was gone. But she was empty, stove and awash, no oars or anything, and we figured they couldn't have got away. We'd been goin' ahead under light sail while cuttin'-in, so we might have gone a mile or so before we begun to s'arch. Allowin' for this, we quartered back and forth till next day noon. Then we give it up. There wa'n't any doubt in our minds they were both goners, specially as the water was full of sharks.

"Next thing was to decide what to do aboard ship. Generally, when the cap'n's taken off, it's enough for the first mate to muster the crew aft and take command. But our case wa'n't just like that. So, soon's we'd given up the s'arch and were aboard again, I went to find the mate and found him sittin' on the edge of his bunk.

" 'Mr. de Roza,' says I, 'do you intend to take command?'

" 'I do,' he says. 'Have you any objection?'

" 'I don't know,' says I. 'I must speak to the men first. May I muster them aft?'

" 'You may,' he says.

"So I musters the crew aft. Now an officer has to be careful how he speaks to the focsle. A whale ship ain't a republic, it's a despotism, and it don't do to let the rowdies before the mast feel's though they had any rights.

" 'Cordin'ly I begun by remarkin' that it 'peared Cap'n Reynolds come to his death by the act of God, and that 'cordin' to the law in such case made and provided, it was the duty of the first mate to assume the office of cap'n and take

command. Which he proposed to do. Then I waited to see if they had anything to say.

"Asaph Dyer, he spoke up, and says—

" 'Mr. Biggs, will you oblige us by tellin' us just what you think ought to be done?'

" 'Certainly, Asaph,' I says. And I went on to say that on the death of the cap'n the first mate took the office 'cordin' to law. That if there was any legal objection to his doin' so, like assaultin' the cap'n or killin' him, it was our duty to take the ship to the nearest port and lay the facts before the authorities. But the nearest port was Honolulu, which was a long ways off. That for my part, I would be satisfied to continue the v'y'ge and allow these matters to rest till the v'y'ge was completed and we returned to the home port, it bein' understood that in so doin' nobody surrendered any of his legal rights.

"THIS was the easiest way out. 'Cordin'ly the Portagee became cap'n, a position he'd never got in his life except by accident. And the mates moved up a peg, I bein' first mate, Gartner second and the boatsteerer third. The crew were satisfied, except probably the Kanakas, and the v'y'ge continued.

"It was next mornin', durin' our watch, when I noticed the three Kanakas leanin' up against the starboard rail and watchin' the water very close. I went up to 'em.

" 'What is it, boys?' I says. 'What do you see?'

"They p'inted to the water.

"I looked where they p'inted, and there I saw two big, tall, narrow fins a-stickin' up out of the water. The biggest fin stood up six foot high, tall's a man, and the other one most as high. The fishes were hard to see, bein' a velvety black, all except spots of white over their eyes and white lower jaws and under markin's. But when you once got 'em, there they were, two big fish, twenty to twenty-five foot long, swimmin' with the ship, very powerful and smooth, their back fins cuttin' the water.

" 'Well, well, boys!' says I. 'A couple of killer whales! Never saw 'em so close before. But this is close enough.'

"So we all stood there for some time, lookin' at the killers."

"Now that you speak of it, Shubael," remarked Captain Rodney, "it's a fact that I never did see a killer close to. Only times I saw 'em they were a-worryin' whales, long ways off, a pack of 'em together. That's why they're called wolves of the sea."

Captain Biggs nodded.

"These two killers stayed with us some time. I'd often see 'em when I looked over the side. And you'd laughed at those Kanakas. The tall Roratonga boy, he'd stare at 'em with his eyes a-startin' out of his head, and he'd say:

" 'Cap'n Reynolds! Mrs. Reynolds!'

"Superstitious critters!"

"I'd hesitate to call it superstition," Mrs. Favor observed. "Those black men may have esoteric perceptions denied to the higher orders of mankind. Who shall say what form the spirit may take?"

"Kind o' funny," Captain Biggs admitted. "Well, we continued the v'y'ge. On the way, we spoke the bark *Powhatan*, of New London, bound home, and by her we sent a report and statement to our owners, she bein' the first vessel we had spoke since Cap'n Reynolds' takin' off.

"So we reached the Sea of Kamchatka, where we planned to stay some time, as there seemed to be good prospects. There was consid'able ice, and the whales kept mostly to the open water, though they sometimes went up into the bights and cracks in the shore ice.

"One moonlight night I was standin' on deck, 'bout the middle of the night, everything very quiet except the whales snortin' round the ship. Bright, clear moonlight. Heard a whale blowin' to windward. Looked, and I saw a right whale breachin' between the ice floes. It breached high and crashed down on the floe, breakin' off a piece. Breached again, and lookin', I saw two killers

breachin' with it, hangin' on to its jaw. Breached half a dozen times, each time weaker, till it failed to breach again. So the killers were at work."

"What killers, Captain?"

"Don't know, ma'am. May have been those same two. Can't say. We continued to take ile. Consid'able bad weather and gales, which made it dangerous. Just such a day, high seas and floatin' ice, we raised right whale, and the Portagee cap'n gave orders to lower.

"Now a cap'n don't always go out in a boat. But the Portagee did, same as when he was mate. So I had kept my boat, and Gartner had kept his, and we had our same crews, my crew consistin' of Asaph, the three Kanakas and one other man.

"So we lowered, and the Portagee's boat struck the whale, which made off very fast among the floatin' ice. And comin' close to some floe ice, it swam underneath, so's they had to cut the line. But they were late in cuttin', and the boat was stove against the ice, five men bein' thrown into the water, and the Portagee jumpin' from a thwart on to the floe. So there he stood, waitin' for us to come and take him off.

"While Gartner's boat was pickin' up the men in the water, we started to row t'wards the floe, some distance off, where the Portagee was standin'.

"ALL AT once two tall, narrow fins come up out of the water just ahead of our boat. There they were! There were the killers, swimmin' fast t'wards the ice floe. Our men had bent to their oars, but seein' me look, they sot still on the thwarts and looked round. The Kanakas begun to talk in their lingo, very excited, and the Roratonga boy he lifted up his voice and yelled like all possessed.

"The Portagee heard the Kanakas, and he saw the killers, and he begun to walk back on the ice floe. There wa'n't but one thing to do 't I could see, and that was to lay on to the killers and put the irons in, or they'd get the Portagee, for 'twas clear they were after him. And there wa'n't any time to lose, for the seas were breakin' over the ice the Portagee was standin' on.

"So I hollers to Asaph, in the bow.

" 'Asaph,' I hollers, 'can you put a couple of irons into those killers?'

"Asaph stands up against the cleat, and he hollers back:

" 'Lay me on, Mr. Biggs,' he hollers. 'Lay me on, four seas away! I'll get 'em!'

" 'Give way then, boys,' I calls to my crew. 'Pull hard!'

"But they acted like they didn't hear. There was a gale blowin', but it's a heavy gale o' wind 't I can't holler through.

" 'Now then!' I hollers to the men on the thwarts. 'Give away! Spring hard! Break an oar!'

"But those three Kanakas sat there with their oar blades a-floatin' on the wash. Wouldn't pull a stroke.

"Meanwhile the killers had dived, and now they come up at the floe edge, raised their snouts above water and looked round over the floe.

"The Portagee, seein' the killers, turned round and run back on the floe. The killers dived. The next minute the whole floe heaved up and split in pieces. We heard the boomin' sound as one after the other the whales rose under the ice and hit it with their backs.

"The Portagee stepped on to a big piece and stood there very scared, the water washin' over his boots. The whales dived again. Once more they rose, set the big piece a-rockin' and broke it in two.

"Through the crack in the ice their hideous great heads shot up straight, as high as six or eight foot. They looked all round to locate the Portagee exact. I could see the white patches over the eyes, the white underjaw and the white criss-cross markin' of the underbody. Their little glistenin' eyes stared all round, very fierce, and their wide mouths, with the awful lookin' rows of teeth, kept openin' and shuttin' like they'd bite your head off.

"They located the Portagee. Once more they went down. Then, boom!

boom! The piece of floe ice he'd been a-standin' on cracked all the way across, and the killers shot into the air, their mouths gapin' wide. With a great splash they fell back. The Portagee had disappeared.

"Soon's we got back to the ship I mustered the men aft and took command and told 'em we'd continue the v'y'ge. Nothin' else to do . . . There ain't much more. We went into Behring Sea, then into St. Lawrence Bay and traded with the natives, pushed through into the Ar'tic, came back, continued to Honolulu, where I found letters. I provisioned and went on . . . Just a regular whalin' v'y'ge, ma'am."

"But you have touched so lightly on the psychic aspects of the story, Captain Biggs," remarked Mrs. Favor. "To me they are the most interesting features."

"Just a superstition of the Portagees and the black boys, ma'am."

"They may be wiser than ourselves, Captain. This final act of retribution—it seems the logical working out of a psychic impulse."

Captain Rodney expectorated once more and wiped his mouth.

"As a general thing, ma'am," he remarked, "that may be true. But Shubael ain't told the whole story yet."

"No," said Captain Biggs. "Not quite. For one thing, we made a good v'y'ge. I was cap'n now, and I was anxious to make a good report. I did. We sailed back a greasy ship full of ile."

"The owners had been anxious," Captain Rodney added. "They felt consid'-able relieved."

"When we were finally put into the dock at New Bedford," concluded Captain Biggs, "who do you think was a-waitin' there on the wharf to shake hands? Well, you'd never guess! I was completely dumbfounded. Couldn't hardly believe it—Captain Reynolds and his wife . . . Yes, sir, there they were. He certainly enjoyed the surprise. She shook hands over 'n' over again."

"They'd got away in the waist boat, of course," said Captain Rodney.

"Did it somehow," Captain Biggs added. "We left 'em behind, not hearin'. They managed to patch and bail the boat. No oars or anything, but the lantern keg was in the locker, so they had food and water. They were picked up after a few days by the whaling bark *Graywing*, remained on that vessel and went home in her far as Norfolk. No real danger."

"Even so, Captain," observed Mrs. Favor, thoughtfully, "does that quite cover it all? There may be a psychic process here. How do you otherwise explain this retribution, or whatever you choose to call it?"

"I don't hardly think, ma'am," replied Captain Biggs, "that there's anything to explain. Not if you know the killer whale."

The Arbolario

by CHARLES A. FREEMAN

ONE OF the most dangerous fakers in the Philippines is the *arbolario*, or tree doctor, who derives his title from the fact that his medicines are popularly supposed to be obtained from trees, or tree fairies, who are variously known as *tikbalangs* and *tianuks*. Sometimes, however, the wandering medicine man claims to have conversed with *matundas sa ponzo;* bearded elves who reside beneath abandoned ant hills, and who give advice to those who know how to approach them.

The *arbolario* is usually a mature man, and is shrewd enough to dodge the constabulary which will gather him in if they catch him. He preys on the ignorant, selling them bottles of vile concoctions and offering prayers for the recovery of his patient. If the sufferer recovers great is the reputation of the faker, but if the unfortunate dies it is easy for him to fix

the blame on some malignant spirit.

Occasionally an *arbolario* uses medicines that are not derived from trees or shrubs. Back in 1918, Doctor Laway created a furore in the Tagalog provinces near Manila by his reputed magical cures. In the Tagalog dialect *laway* means sputum, and the faker merely spat on his patients and rubbed it in. Prayers were also included, and possibly hypnotism.

Within a week the town of Paranaque was crowded with those who hoped to be healed of their infirmities, and they included not only the *taos*, or peasants, but numerous *illustrados*, or members of the upper classes. So great became the crowd that the constabulary, while unable to prove that Laway was receiving money or practicing medicine illegally, finally intervened and placed the *arbolario* under arrest. The technical charge was that of violating the sanitary ordinances, and when the faker was examined by physicians he was found to be both demented and diseased. Two years in the insane asylum apparently cured the curer for he is reported to be at his old stunts again.

A recent case in which an *arbolario* figured was one in which a partially paralysed girl was induced to drink a quart of gin in which certain grasses were steeped. She became fully paralysed in a short time and within twenty-four hours she died. The faker promptly disappeared.

Not a few of this type of gentry deal in love potions, drinks supposed to render the client invulnerable to pistol or rifle bullets, *pan de khaki*, a much touted witch frightening bush, and other *gayumas* or charms. Often he is the jackal of the village wise woman, or *manhuhula*, and secures clients for her fortune telling seances. As a gatherer of information he would make a splendid intelligence agent, as he is welcome in many homes and, figuratively speaking, has his ear to the ground.

In garb he is slovenly and affects abject poverty, but when in funds he will deck himself out in gorgeous apparel and dissipate in a town where he is unknown. Of course there is an undercurrent of fact beneath this arch faker's bluffs. It is undeniable that he has some knowledge of strange herbs that in certain cases will either cure or poison. With stones and leaves he is able to cure the *anun*, or white, leprous looking skin blotches which so often affect negroes and Asiatics, and sometimes Caucasians. He works apparent wonders on boils and tropical ulcers, and is usually a skilful masseur.

In his crude pharmacopœia is a drug unknown to the medical profession which will produce symptoms of paralysis, and for that drug he also possesses the antidote. It is generally believed that it is his custom to introduce this drug into the food of comparatively wealthy persons that he may be called in to make a cure.

Another graft of the *arbolario* is to discover a magical spring. There are many mineral springs in the Philippines, and by taking bottles of water from them and introducing medicinal herbs he starts a stampede by those who imagine that they have been benefited by drinking the mixture. Then the *arbolario* squats by his spring and collects offerings from the credulous. Sometimes if he expects that the rush will be great he leases land around the spring, and converts the premises into a miniature gold mine by renting out concessions for the erection of hot dog stands of the native variety.

Possibly the most lucrative discovery made by an *arbolario* was that of a spring which bubbled out from under the corner of a church at Gapan in central Luzon. The faker promptly arranged for two individuals to announce that they had been cured by its waters, and then camped by the spring to await the rush. It came, and so did the sanitary officials a week later to find the place a public picnic ground with credulous natives waiting their turn to drink the healing waters. Then the constabulary arrived, and a certain amount of order was restored, but no more cures were reported. Of course the constabulary was blamed and the *arbolario* drifted away with bulging pockets. Great is the faker in the Philippines.

HAMMERED HOME

A Story of a Cowboy Tracker

By S. OMAR BARKER

SLIM PRICE walked, without knocking, into the line cabin where the JJ wagon was camped. Six of the seven cowboys, squatting or cocked on their elbows around the fireplace, gave him friendly greeting. The seventh was a stranger who had just joined the roundup that afternoon, coming on a long cruise for strays from the faraway Tijeras outfit, far over beyond the Hard Luck Mountains. He had found no strays—in fact, no JJ puncher remembered ever having seen the Tijeras brand this far east—but the stranger, a silent, knife chinned man who gave his name as Johnny Miller, had been invited to bed with them for the night and had accepted the customary hospitality.

"We been kinder expectin' you, Slim," greeted Banty Bryan, foreman of the roundup. "Got two, three cows o' yourn in the pickup yesterday. Had supper? No? Here, Mac, drag up that pot o' beans. Set here by the fire, Slim."

The red flicker of firelight showed gray lines of fatigue on Slim Price's good humored face. And it showed, too, a crudely made stall, or bandage, on his left thumb.

Dick Doreen saw it and grinned.

"Been suckin' yer thumb, Slim?" he asked. "Or did that gal of yours slam the door on it?"

Slim's eyes studied the fire as he finished with a mouthful of beans before answering.

"That?" He grinned. "Oh, I got it smashed by a hammer."

"Yeah?" kidded Dick. "Crackin' pecans?"

"No." Slim still grinned, but for all that his face looked serious in the firelight.

"Buildin' you a log cabin fer two?"

"No."

"Shut up, Dick, an' give him a chance at the beans," put in Banty Bryan. "Who cares how come him to mash his thumb? Like as not shoein' a horse, eh, Slim?"

"No."

"Say, feller," pursued Dick Doreen, giving Slim a nudge with his boot, "how come NO has got to be yer brand all of a sudden? Gosh, you'd think gittin' a mashed thumb was a sacred an' sanctified secret. How in heck did you do it, anyhow? Speak up 'fore I boot you into the fireplace!"

Slim Price's mild blue eyes looked soberly around at the faces of his friends and the stranger, all ruddy from the firelight, and came back to stare for a second into the blaze, before he spoke.

"I reckon it don't matter what their real names was," he said. "We'll just call 'em Jones. It was about last April that the two brothers of 'em, both of 'em bony and ga'nt from hackin' an' coughin', moved in from Missouri or somewheres back East an' took up camp in the ol' mine shack in one of them sunny coves above the funnel part of Embudo Cañon —you know the shack, Dick, an' the cañon, with a spring an' waterhole right where it narrows? Lots o' places about like that all through them Peligro Badlands—"

"Say, feller," broke in Dick Doreen sharply, "have you been eatin' loco or smokin' marihuana? I *ask* you how come you to mash yer thumb an'—"

"I'm tellin' you!"

The rest of the boys laughed a little and then sat silently expectant, for Slim Price did not look like a man joking.

"Well, they was the two of 'em, Charlie and Earl, both of 'em lungers, but able to get around. Only Earl, who really wasn't only a kid, was a heap stronger than Charlie and he kinder did the rustlin' of wood and so forth and waited on Charlie. You never seen two fellers in your life that thought so much of each other, and they had their minds all made up to take the sun an' git well. It's only about the third day they're there that ol' Hank Makison, who has got a lease on all the grazin' thereabouts, rides up on 'em as they're baskin' in the sun and advises 'em to *vamos* to hell outa there.

"Some of you boys know Hank Makison—seem like he's wrastled with raisin' cattle so long on that Hard Luck range that he's got to be purt' near as crazy as them cows of his that's always eatin' loco somewheres or other because there ain't no grass. Suspicious as a wolf.

"But these Jones boys ain't worms by no means, even if they are tenderfeet and health seekers. 'Why,' asks Charlie, the older one, 'why in the name of corn fodder should we leave here, mister? We've just come. And I've got my rent lease papers for this cabin, all signed up by Mr. Baker, president of the Bank of Cruces, who owns it! Who are you to advise us to pull out?'

" 'Me?' snorts ol' Makison. 'I'm the lease holder on all the grazing in these parts, and I don't aim to have nobody snoopin' around, livin' on my range pertendin' to be sick an' then runnin' off some night with a herd of steers! I ain't—'

" 'Listen heah, mistuh,' puts in Earl—he's the kid—'we ain't goin' to use up nothin' but the sunshine, an' I reckon theah's a right plenty of that for evahbody. We come here purposin' to be friends with ouah neighbors, if any, but we also come purposin' to stay!'

" 'I'M ADVISIN' you to *vamos!*' growls Makison. 'An' I'm *orderin'* you not to go messin' around gittin' water from my spring down in the cañon yonder or you may have to pull out on the run. You savvy? I ain't goin' to have no trespassers.'

"With that he rides off. O' course it kinder worries them two harmless boys, but they've got a shallow well handy to the cabin, an' they don't aim to wander about much, but they do aim to stick, take their sun baths an' try to git well.

"Well, it seems, fer a wonder, that ol' Makison don't bother 'em much after he's made a trip to town an' been told what's

what by old man Baker, the banker, except that he's about as neighborly as a tied up rattlesnake, always keepin' a suspicious eye on 'em, an' ridin' by ever' so often to growl at 'em an' advise 'em to pull out—which they don't do—until they git kinder use to it an' don't pay him much mind any more. The ol' sun in them coves is beginnin' to perk 'em up some, an' even Charlie has begun to git hopes of gittin' plumb well some day an' driftin' back home to that Missouri strawberry farm of his he's always talkin' about.

"I'd took 'em out there in the first place an' I manage to git away onct or twice an' go see how they're gittin' along, even though it is one hell of a ways from my place over there. They ask my advice about how to take Makison's growlin', an' I tell 'em to jest sit tight. 'Course, ol' Makison, as some of you know, wouldn't open a lip to warn *me* of a rattlesnake since the little ruckus him an' me had back a year or two, but as I tell the Jones boys, I ain't got no hard feelin's agin the ol' coot. He's jest kinder loco an' bad tempered an' I got cause to know from my ol' dad that he'd had plenty o' trouble to make him thataway, an' I figger that like as not he ain't as bad at heart as he lets on.

"That cove above the Embudo is a plumb to hell-an'-gone place, you know, an' as Makison don't really run no stock in there except the bunch of locoed stuff he's always got, which he cribs in the big holler of the cañon above the funnel where they ain't a sprig o' the weed growin', neither him nor his men gits around that way very often; an' so the Jones boys don't have no trouble at all for some time exceptin' to take his cussin's an' threats with a coupla grains o' salt when he does come around.

"As I say, there ain't many fellers comes by that way, but it seems that back in the hills a little farther, they's been established a game refuge to protect the few deer that's left thereabouts, an' somehow the State game warden gits hold of a rumor that there's been fellers in there poachin' an' sellin' the venison at a nice price to folks that like meat but don't ask no questions. So the State warden himself comes by and gits me to ride in with him. Knowin' the Jones boys likes to see folks, I fix it so we'll git there fer dinner, an' I'm a locoed wahoo if they don't serve us venison! The warden takes a bite or two, swallers kinder funny, then pushes back his plate.

" 'Looky here, Jones,' he says to Charlie, 'where did you git this meat?'

" 'Oh, this beef, you mean?' says Jones. 'Why I bought it from a cowboy that come by. Said it was veal from a critter that had got a leg broke up in the hills an' he'd killed it before the hurt damaged the meat any. Looked like good meat so I bought some of it. Paid a mighty stiff price for it, too. If it ain't fit to eat, sir, I reckon it's Earl's cookin' of it. Anyway—'

" 'Beef my eye! Veal my foot!' says the warden, layin' his gun out by his plate. 'That's a fine soundin' story, but this here's venison—deer meat! And I hereby place both of you under arrest for killing deer on a game refuge. It is goin' to be right expensive meat. Your fine'll come to around one hundred dollars apiece!'

"Which kinder takes the sap out of them two Jones boys. The excitement, in fact, gits Charlie to coughin' an' that makes Earl plumb fightin' mad an' he's ready to do battle with the warden, me an' anybody else that accuses them of violatin' the law.

"It jest happens that the warden an' me had rode range together years ago, an' he seemed to have a heap o' confidence in me, so when I put it to him straight that these boys certainly ain't killed no deer with the old blunderbuss six-shooter which is the only gun they've got in the house, an' that if they've bought some illegally they ain't really done no wrong, not knowin' it was deer meat, then the warden eases down some an' agrees to let 'em off if they'll tell who it was sold 'em the meat. Which they can't do—not give his name, anyways, but they do give a good description, with the result that

some days later the local warden in Cruces picks up the man, a puncher named Jack or John something or other—I disremember jest what as I didn't see him—and they call in the Jones boys as witnesses and hook him a one hundred dollar fine for it."

"An' I suppose what ails yer thumb is that you snagged it on a bottle opener or something whilst celebratin' on your informer's share of the fine, heh?" broke in Dick Doreen, getting up to stir the fire.

Several of the cowboys stirred, rolled cigarets and advised Dick to shut up. The stranger stirred uneasily in his bedroll, yanked his pants, boots, gun and gun belt under his head for a higher pillow, cocked himself up on his elbow and spoke.

"IT AIN'T that I don't appreciate your hospitality, boys," he said, "but I could of slept more out with coyotes, an' I would of done so, too, if I'd had any notion this here camp would turn out to be a all night story tellin' circle. I'd shore crave to sleep!"

Slim turned to him with a quizzical grin.

"Sorry you don't like my story, stranger," he said. "I reckon I can shut up now an' finish this here talky-talk at breakfast. They ain't much more to tell. But I reckon I'd best quit, so's all you boys can git to sleep."

"Hell, no, Slim," said Banty Bryan, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "Go ahead."

"Only lemme ask you," put in Dick Doreen, "are you or are you not going to answer my question about how come yer mashed thumb?"

"I am," said Slim soberly, "if you want to listen. An' I'll cut it short as a lamb's tail for you. Where was I? Oh, yeah, the Jones boys tellin' on the guy that sold 'em venison so's he gits a one hundred dollar fine. *Bueno!* So the Joneses stay in town a few days and when they git back to their shack something has happened to their little well. The weather's been gittin' dryer an' dryer an' it's mighty nigh dried up anyhow, but somebody has been there an' filled it up fer 'em. Jest about sech a trick as ol' Makison might do, they figger. Well, they start diggin' it out but the work kinder gits 'em, an' the first thing they could know ol' Charlie is runnin' a fever an' needs medicine.

"So Earl catches his burro to go to town, an' before he goes he hikes down into the Embudo cañon to bring up a bucket o' water from Makison's spring he'd told him to keep away from. It seems the old man is jest throwin' a dozen or so more locoed steers into the meadow up above, which same is shut off from the narrows at the spring by a strong wire gate, and he spies the kid carryin' water an' comes gallopin' down swearin' an' snortin', and tells him to git to hell back up to his nest an' not come down there no more if he don't want trouble. He takes one slap at the bucket with his rope, makin' Earl spill about half of it, an' then whirls an' rides back up through the gate, shuttin' it behind him. Some of the locoed steers makes a few runs at him as he rides through, but he goes on off, an' the kid climbs back up to the cabin with what water he's got left, which he figgers ought to last until he gits back from town.

"He gives his sick brother a hug an' goes off acrost the trail, leavin' Charlie right cheered up with the promise of his gettin' back right soon with the medicine.

"But it's a long drag in and back on a burro, and it's four days later that he gits back. What does he find? He looks in the cabin—no Charlie. He hollers. No answer only the beller of some ol' steer down in the Embudo. There ain't no note left nor nothin' and the kid jest natcherly goes plumb crazy. But he's got sense enough to look for tracks, fearin' foul play, an' what he finds is jest ol' Charlie's own tracks down the foot trail towards the Embudo spring. Then he sees that the water bucket's gone, an' he savvies that his brother has run out of water an' got up an' headed down to the spring after some more. Earl goes plungin' down that rough trail fit to kill a well man, let alone a sick one.

"But this time, instead of the locoed cattle all bein' up in the meadow above the fence, they's several of 'em dead at the spring, an' a number of 'em wild, wobbly an' woozy standin' around. Whilst right at the spring, all hooked and trampled down in the mud, is the body of ol' Charlie, his dead black fingers still hangin' on to his water pail. Any of you boys that has ever saw a cowboy go down in front of a stampede can kinder guess what a horrible death that pore ol' lunger must of met, with them locoed cattle hookin' an' trompin' him down at the spring.

"You wouldn't of thought even ol' Hank Makison would of done such a dirty trick, would you? But shore 'nough, what that lunger kid finds is that the gate at the narrows ain't merely been busted down by the cattle. It's been swung plumb open an' fastened, an' from the way the ground is trampled all around it looks like that herd o' crazy cows has been shoved through in a bunch an' stampeded right on to pore ol' sick Charlie. Anyway, Earl Jones remembers then how ol' Makison had warned him there'd be trouble if they come down to that spring again, an' so, with his grief chokin' him to a frenzy, he swears right then an' there, I reckon, to find ol' Hank an' shoot the black heart right out of him for the brutal murder of his brother.

"Anyways, it must of been several days later that I happened by that way and the Joneses are both gone. I see there's a steer pawin' at fresh dug dirt down clost to the narrers, and when I take a good look, I see it's a grave, with the words 'Charlie Jones, My Brother', scratched on a rock at one end. Then I take a look at tracks an' see for myself about what's happened. Honest, it kinder got me down, too, to think that any man, even ol' Makison, would do sech as that.

"Earl Jones ain't up at the cabin, so I start tryin' to track him out, an' it's plain enough where he's headin' to—he's headin' in the direction where he knowed ol' Makison's ranch was. When I git to Makison's I find out from the Mex cook he keeps since his wife got killed, that the Jones kid has been there askin' fer the boss, but hasn't said what he wants of him, an' has rode his burro right on toward Cruces where the Mex says ol' Makison has prob'ly gone.

"WELL, I've got plenty of my own ridin' to do an' cattle to look after, but right then I figger my own business'll have to wait whilst I foller up Earl Jones. Somehow I'd took a mighty strong likin' to both of 'em boys an' I hate to think of him gittin' into more trouble with hot lead than he knows how to git out of. There ain't any doubt but he's game, and it's plain enough what he's aimin' to do.

"But seem like ever'where I foller I'm jest in time to hear that Makison's been there, an' then that the kid's been there too an' asked about him, an' then rode on after him. It seems Makison is makin' a cattle buyin' tour around the farms an' one pasture ranches, is how come he's so hard to find—or is he, maybe, actually on the dodge from young Jones? I dunno.

"Of course I'd of caught up with the kid sooner, only he'd bought him a horse at one of the *ranchitos* and was makin' better time than he had on the burro, which is how come him to overhaul ol' Makison yesterday at Pete Lemson's place. Apparently they ain't nobody at home so ol' Makison has been snootlin' around the corrals an' sheds tryin' to raise somebody an' when he steps from around the corner of a shed there's Earl Jones with that big old cannon of his tremblin' in both his hands, an' he shoves it smack into ol' Makison's ribs jest as I ride up.

"Ol' Makison lets out one snort an' then jest stands there, lookin' kinder queer-like down at the boy that's got the gun in his ribs.

"It's a touchy minute and I'm afraid if I come plungin' up on the gallop ever'thing may git kinder upset. So as they haven't seen me yet an' I can hear young Jones talkin' in a low tone like he might

not be goin' to shoot right away, I jump off an' sneak around the shed, so that I come right up close to 'em outa sight an' unsuspected.

" 'Makison,' the young feller is sayin', 'you murdered my brothuh. You ran a herd of locoed cattle ovuh a helpless sick man. I'm going to kill you. If you have anything to say, say it quick. When I count three I'm goin' to shoot your heart out! One—two—th-ree!'

"*Thump!* Down comes the old trigger, but there ain't any bang, an' no bullet zizzin' through ol' Makison's body. Jest, thump! You see I've jumped around that corner like a wil' cat an' made a grab for Earl's gun, too late to take it, but jest in time for my thumb to git between the hammer an' the firin' pin as he pulled. *Thump!* Smack onto my thumbnail an' maybe you think that ol' cannon hammer didn't peg down hard! Gimme a nice li'l blood blister to tote around. Which same, my friends, is how come me to have a tied up thumb here tonight!"

Slim glanced swiftly around the cabin. The cowboys were all wide enough awake now, except that from the stranger's bed roll came an exaggerated sound of snoring. Slim Price eased his gun at his hip and rose, yawning. The cowboys stirred uneasily, waiting for him to go on.

"Well?" questioned one.

"Why, durn yer skin, Slim," snorted Dick Doreen, fumbling for a cigaret. "Why in hell's hot water didn't you let the kid kill him? If it'd been me I'd of—"

"I disarmed both of 'em," said Slim soberly. "I didn't let him kill Makison because Makison wasn't the murderer of Charlie Jones!"

"You mean . . ."

"I mean," went on the cowboy, facing away from the fire toward the shadows of the room, "that I done some track readin' myself, an' the same horse tracks that me an' the warden had found in the game refuge was the ones that showed to have been at the openin' of that gate an' shovin' of Makison's locos down the narrers on to ol' Charlie Jones! Jest a sneakin' way for a skunk to git even with 'em for tellin' who sold 'em venison."

The stranger rolled uneasily in his covers and sat up, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"Gosh, still yarnin', you fellers?" he yawned. "Me, if you'll unlock that door, Doreen, I got to step outside a minute."

Dick Doreen stepped to the door and unlocked it. As the stranger fumbled at his trousers to pull them on, Slim Price caught a flickering glimpse of his gun being slipped cautiously from its leather holster to the front of the man's shirt. As he stepped over a bedroll toward the door the stranger found himself suddenly facing the steady eyes of Slim Price. With a slight elbow movement Slim eased back his jacket, showing a deputy sheriff's star.

"Johnny Miller," he said, his voice tense and quiet. "I'd jest stay inside if I was you. You are under arrest—for the murder of Charlie Jones. An' the next time you figger to pull any crooked work a-horseback, don't git you a mount with a pigeon toed twist to his right hoof! Put up yer hands! You see, boys, I run on to them same horsetracks agin an' follered 'em up here today. I—"

Johnny Miller plunged suddenly headlong to the floor tackling Slim's legs as he went and the two clinched, cougar-like, on the floor. But only for a moment, and then there was Johnny Miller face down on the floor with Slim sitting astride him, snapping his hands into the shackles of the law.

Slim yanked the handcuffed man, cursing, to his feet, ripped the gun from inside his shirt and turned to the JJ cowboys.

"I want to thank you boys," he said, "fer listenin' so patient to my story. An' now if you'll all do what goin' out you need to, so's we can lock that door again, I'll be right much obliged, an' then you can git to yer snoozin'. An' if you don't mind, Banty, I'd like to stir right early in the mornin'. Me an' Johnny Miller, here, has got to ride into the county seat an' hunt us up a judge, a jury an'—a scaffold."

Native Justice

By

WILLIAM WESTRUP

IT IS a far cry from Africa to America, yet the two countries are linked together by the negro, and the color problem is one that has vexed American statesmen for many years. In Africa the line between white and colored is still very sharply defined, but the southern and more completely civilized part of the Dark Continent is already finding that America's problem is likely to be its own.

Still for the present the native has little desire to compete with the white man and the hold of the old tribal customs is strong. Particularly is this so in the various Native Territories, where for the most part a white man is a good deal safer than he would be in a modern town. Of course there may be minor ills to bear, but granted a decent chief in any district and any complaint will be promptly and justly dealt with.

I recall an incident that happened a good many years ago in the mountains of Basutoland, which is an independent—very independent!—native kingdom ruled by a paramount chief, with the help of a British resident and British police inspectors. For the rest, it is purely native—laws and customs and all.

In conjunction with a friend I had secured permission to trade in the mountains, then rarely visited by white men, and it was some little experience. There were no roads, and hardly any tracks, but we took up some trade goods by means of a train of donkeys and settled down to trade.

The Mountain Basutos have any amount of stock, and in the sheltered valleys they grow maize, wheat and—of all queer things—green peas. We pitched our camp at an altitude of about 8000 feet in the country of one Rufolatsani, a chief of the old school and—but that is another story.

Anyhow, we began to accumulate very considerable quantities of grain and wool bartered for our trade goods, and it was then we discovered what a curse goats can be. All day and most of the night the native goats would sidle up to our stack, rip a hole in a bag and the way the wheat and maize disappeared was scandalous. Whenever we saw them we heaved bricks and terrible language at them, but in five minutes they would be back again.

Then, one day when their depredations had been particularly bad, my friend heaved a pick handle at the vanishing flock and by the merest chance it landed, end on, at the base of one billygoat's head, and he never smiled again.

Needless to say there was trouble. We were in native territory, days away from any white man, and we had slain what the native regards as almost sacred—one of his stock. The owner

was loud in his demands for satisfaction, but at the same time I would emphasize there was never any question of bodily danger. We claimed provocation and the native alleged murder. There was a lot of shouting that meant nothing, but in the end matters were smoothed over by our agreeing to agree by the decision of Chief Rufolatsani.

The case was heard next day. Incidentally, we had heard the natives holding high revel over the corpse during the night, and had determined on our line of action. Consequently the plaintiff was amazed and indignant when we pleaded guilty straightaway. He had come prepared with a host of witnesses, most of whom, of course, had been nowhere near the spot at the time of the tragedy, and he felt we weren't playing the game.

But we were adamant. We pleaded guilty and said that if plaintiff would deliver to us the slain goat, we would at once pay him its full current value—eight shillings, to wit. Rufolatsani considered this and then announced that it was a fair offer. Plaintiff must produce the *corpus delicti* and receive eight shillings and the case would be settled.

Having eaten the goat, plaintiff of course could not produce it. He pointed this out, but Rufolatsani quite agreed with our contention that we could not be expected to pay for something we had not received. Therefore judgment must be entered in our favor, by default!

At the conclusion of the action we sought out the plaintiff and offered to buy another perfectly good goat for the sum of eight shillings. He hadn't thought of this way out of the difficulty, and was quite elated when we said we only wanted a young one. He rushed off to find his herd which he knew would be somewhere in the vicinity of our grain stack and returned presently with a kid, three parts grown. This meant palatable meat, so we handed over eight shillings, and honor was satisfied all round.

Moreover, at a word from Rufolatsani, the native herdboys kept their goats well away from our stack from that time forward.

WHEN the crops are reaped in the mountains of Basutoland there is a season festival and a good deal of native beer is brewed and consumed. It is a time when things happen, and we bumped into established custom through sheer ignorance. Thusly:

A native working in the lands flushed a hare and his dogs ran it down. We had had no flesh for two weeks, so we descended on the native and opened negotiations for the purchase of the said hare, which eventually became our property for the sum of sixpence cash and two pipes of tobacco.

The hare was sizzling nicely in our stewpot when an army of young bucks, headed by the chief of the district's principal queen, breezed up and demanded the animal. We laughed. So did the bucks. They were full of beer, and in any case they had the correct slant on the joke. Three of them went to our pot, lifted the lid and most disrespectfully took what they wanted.

Africa not being America, we were unarmed. Firearms are not encouraged in Basutoland. Also we were outnumbered by about fifteen to one. All we could do was to tell the merry thieves what we thought of them, and the sort of vengeance we would exact in due course; but as our knowledge of Sesuto was more or less fragmentary we didn't do much good.

However, we sent a mounted messenger post haste to Rufolatsani, the local chief, telling him what had happened and stating that we declined to do any more trade till our honor was satisfied. As we were trading for our own benefit this sounds rather absurd, but a white trader among natives is of considerable importance—rather like the old Hudson's Bay traders. Moreover, natives had been coming to Rufolatsani's district from all over the place in order to trade wool and grain with us, and as some of them traveled several days to reach the place, they

naturally would kick if they found on arrival that we refused to deal.

That is precisely what happened. We refused to buy a grain of wheat or swap a single blanket and this at once reflected on Rufolatsani. To do him justice he tried the case first thing next day, and, judging by the audience, it had created some considerable stir. The court sat in the open, Rufolatsani, my partner and myself having stools, and every one else standing or squatting on the ground. We couldn't follow the evidence, but there was plenty of it.

Evidently the point was a knotty one, though to us the issue was clear-cut enough. But Rufolatsani deferred judgment and said he would let us know the verdict in the afternoon. In the meantime would we resume trading operations?

We wouldn't. In Africa the prestige of the white man is very real and precious, and we wanted some one's blood before calming down. So we rode back to our camp, which was about a mile from the native village; and the bucks who had ridden in with a pack train of wool to sell, and the natives who wanted to acquire blankets or what-not, and the women who had walked six weary miles with a load of faggots on their heads—no wood grew where we were—to be exchanged for trade goods, gathered together and said uncomplimentary things about the village.

At two in the afternoon a courier rode down to deliver the considered judgment. He said we had won the case. The verdict was that *the man who had sold us the hare must pay us a fine of five shillings!* Would we please begin trading at once?

We said we wouldn't. The man who had sold us the hare was a decent, civil old bird, and we had nothing whatever against him. We were after the young bucks who had filched the hare from our pot. The sooner the courier chased himself the better we should be pleased.

There was another long interval, during which we smoked peacefully, and then an old native rode down to us, and said, in effect, that we had won our appeal. The man who had sold us the hare must pay us *ten* shillings!

And yet, when he explained, we saw that Rufolatsani had the right of it. All game in the district belonged, not only theoretically but actually, to the chief. Having caught a hare, the native hunter should have reported to Rufolatsani; then the hare might or might not have been bestowed on him. In selling to us he broke the law, and the queen was within her rights in demanding the game, which was by then in our pot. The only point in our favor was that she went the wrong way about it, being full of beer at the time. Rufolatsani himself, being a thorough old gentleman, would have said nothing whatever to us, but would probably have soaked the seller of the hare good and hard. As it was, he quite realized we had a grievance.

We declined to take the fine, but next day we allowed the pack horses to be offsaddled by our tent, and once more the flow of trade resumed its interrupted course. But just who won that case I really could not say.

A Tale of the Egret Hunters of the Louisiana Delta Region

A *Bad* ELEMENT *In* FEATHERS

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

TAKING some of these fellows that comes down Old Mississip' and they ain't so reliable as they might be. Somehow they don't have any sense of honor about some things. A while back such a one came out of the Ohio, and he was just naturally lacking; that's all there is to it. He had a nice outfit, good guns, dressed tol'able and looked like he might be somebody. When he came down into the Swamp Hammocks, though, he give himself clear away.

You see, we were hunting feathers. 'Course, feathers is a commodity, same as moonshine, or ducks for market, or bumboating. You don't do it out in the open, but when you do do it, account of how things are, a man's expected to act according, and not be mean and unreliable.

Away down yonder's a place that's called Wildcat Ridge. It's just a hummock, covered with jungle, about nine, ten miles long and prob'ly two, three miles wide, here and there. All around it is brakes, thick and close up; but there's open marsh and bayous, too, all around this Wildcat Ridge, and it's so far back that prob'ly nobody ever gets to go there excepting by accident, or he's lost.

One day a fellow name of Pied Lutton caught a flight off east of where he was sitting in the top of a tall cypress. It was a big swell butt and give a favorable lookout from a snag seat up't the top. It was tight, too, surrounded by leaves and yet open so's he could see without being seen. Away over the brake he saw the white sparkles that told him it was egrets. It was soon dark, but in the morning, knowing which way to look, he saw them again heading off opposite, light shimmering on their backs. 'Course, it was a long ways, but he angled over thataway and come night, in another tall cypress, he lined them up again. This time he could see them real plain for he'd gained about three miles.

In less'n a week he was right into the flight, and he could see where those birds were heading in; and besides them he could see other flights coming in on other courses. 'Course, when a man can get three or four other flocks lined up where they all come together, a feather hunter knows what to hope. Lutton, knowing that country, almost hoped he was going to have that nesting roost to himself. He was away back inside the brakes, where going through was just like following a snake's back looking for its head.

Lutton hadn't ever been in just those parts before, but he'd been over south of it, where it was more open, and once he had like never to have come out of a dark corner over north of the place he was now.

When he came into the belt of swamp around Wildcat Ridge, he found he had to hunt around for water to push through with his skiff and outboard motor before he could land on to it. From the looks of it he kinda mistrusted where he had come to, but of course he wasn't sure, and had to look out.

Finally he landed in, and that night, which was clear, he could see the birds coming in. The flocks wasn't very large, naturally. Two, three, five birds apiece was about all that went together. Same time there were quite a lot of lines coming in. It had been a long time since Lutton had seen anything like it. They came with the setting sun on their backs, and they came blinking into the leveling shine. They came down out the north and from the south. Counting, Lutton made out more'n twenty flights. Making allowances for birds that slipped in without his seeing 'em, he could estimate about two pounds of feathers, anyhow. 'Course, with average feathers running three, four hundred dollars a pound, good, early feathers are higher. These birds had only just laid their eggs, and it sure was a pretty sight, their lining in thataway.

Lutton listened, but he couldn't hear any shooting. The birds pitched down into the canopy without any suspicions. Take birds that's been shot at, naturally they act different'n those that have been left alone. And when any one's shooting a flight the way the birds act is real plain, for they dart up and scatter around uneasy-like. Lutton knew he was in luck, so he works up the ridge along the bayous and comes in opposite the place they've come to roost-nest.

Soon's he arrived in there he found he had some disappointment. Two other launches were in a kind of little bay, including Tip Coving and Joe Welks. They all knew Lutton, if not personally, at least having heard of him. They knew he wasn't any Federal, Audubonor, or those fellows that's always interfering with business. Seems like there were six other outfits and nine men had come in on the flights, all independent. Welks had come more'n thirty miles down out the Delta. Fellow name of Pitt Cumbey was from over northwest. He had an awful time, dragging over rafts and coming through

swamps where he had to cut his way in places. He'd a pretty sizable launch, too, which he had to tackle-block instead of drag, where he worked over.

'Course, with all of them there, they had to agree not to shoot. Take it when a man's found just his own roost, he can work out on the flights and pick off birds with a long, light gun and not alarm or break up the roost. But if three, four begin to shoot out thataway, somebody's sure to kind of hog in too close to the roost and before long it's just like a war in the brake, slam banging away. Being old-timers, they all agreed it was a pick-up, now, every man according to his luck.

Naturally, as it was early, finding shed feathers isn't a fast way to make money. Maybe one'll scramble around in the roost all day and not find more'n six feathers, and while shooting gives a man perhaps twenty-five or thirty good feathers a bird, fifty-two being the most feathers off a bird —most I ever heard of, anyhow—and it takes seventy or eighty birds to make a pound, hunting for shedders is sure slow and tedious. When the young are hatched out, though, shedding comes fast and a man can pick up good wages.

This roost was lots bigger than Lutton had any idea of. That shows how easy it is for a man to underestimate. Instead of only about two pounds, prob'ly there were twenty pounds of feathers, or more. The way it was, those birds were 'bout all of them sneaks. Here and there a flock would be spotters, coming in high and careless, but mostly the birds ducked under the tops of the trees and come kittering in low over the water. Makes a man mad trying to follow in those sneaking scoundrels.

Sometimes a man'll just know there's a big roost right around close in and the way the birds twist and snake he probably loses half the season chasing up birds that's doubling back on him or hitting through a jungle he can't swim, drag, walk or swing through. If it hadn't been for just those few flights of spotter birds, that roost might have been there for years, all wasted. But now't Lutton, Welks, Coving, Sparks, Humber, Picolilo, and those fellers was in there, the only question was how they'd work it. Being so many of them, they couldn't begin shooting, because in a lot like that there's always mufflers and they would sneak in killing, and soon as that begun the roost'd be broken up.

THIS scoundrel, Picolilo, was out'n the Ohio. He was a kind of slick, dark, deep eyed fellow, who didn't talk any to speak of. He 'greed, though, in so many words, to hunt shedders and he worked this with the rest. They circled around, everybody running logs, hitting brush, and not dividing up territory the way some advocates. You see, if you divide territory, some is naturally better'n others, account of the way the wind blows, or some is thicker than others, harder to rake. Picolilo was a stranger who hadn't ever been seen in those parts before by any of the boys. Same time, the way he worked it was plain he was an old hand. He listened, didn't advise any one, and minded his own business. He was lucky, and had eyes that didn't miss much.

He'd spot a plume no bigger'n a white horsehair all tangled in the vines or lying coiled on the muck. He'd see feathers where others had passed by, just recent. He found more feathers'n any two of those boys there. He was making good wages while the others were waiting for the shedding to be real good. Now'n' then he'd mention some place or other, off in foreign parts. He wasn't just a Mississippi Delta feather hunter. He'd worked Florida. He'd been in the West Indies. He didn't think any more of cottonmouths or rattlesnakes than I would of mosquitoes. The only snakes ever worried him, he said, was the Lance of Fire, that jumps fifteen foot and pokes a man in the neck, or leg. Them kinda bothered account of the poison killing in about ten minutes.

We were all poking around in the swamps, eleven of us being there, and all

beginning to make a little money. When there's a thousand or so birds there's always feathers dropping, and once in a while a broken wing or some bird that's eat something that sickens it or casualties like that, helps. One of the boys found two birds which had collided with each other, tangling all up so's they couldn't separate. He just pulled them apart and picked eighty-seven feathers and after showing the others what he'd done, he let them go.

This fellow, Lutton, was a poetic kind of cuss. He claimed he was an artist, or something like that. Anyhow, kind of a funny fellow. Every once in a while he'd climb a lookout just to watch the sunset or sunrise, taking a lot of trouble to see away off yonder. 'Course, he didn't talk about it. A man sure hates to expose his queer feelings and notions, thataway, 'nless he's a darned fool. Same time, these boys all got on to his notions, or anyhow, some of them did. He'd climb to watch the sceneries when the others wouldn't bother, but saved the daylight finding plumes.

And one sunset he saw something. Looking off across the tree tops, he noticed a flight of eleven birds which he had spotted a few days before. They were sneakers, coming under the forest canopy level through the openings, and pitching up over necks of woods. As he watched their up and down flight, suddenly he noticed a flicker in the flashing of their wings. The birds spread out explosively. When they came near him he counted nine instead of eleven. He knew what that meant. He had heard no sound, however, and this was something else again, he could not be sure just what—a shotgun of small gage or light charges. Anyhow, somebody was a traitor, and some one was violating the gentleman's agreement among the feather hunters.

Lutton came into the camp on the bayou early that night. He couldn't tell who was to be mistrusted. He just looked the boys over, and all of them had the same expression of furtive expectancy. That might not mean anything though, for of course feather hunters had to keep their eyes open on account of the Government, which was always sending in wardens who snooped around, pretending to be in the feather business, or being sports, or things like that, being mighty unreliable so a man couldn't tell who to trust. Lutton wasn't going to take any chances, not with Welks, Cumbey, Coving or any of them. Feather hunters had actually between seasons gone to work for the Government and never let on till they had old-timers they'd known for years all sewed up for violating the law. And if somebody was hard up no telling what he would do. Lutton watched, of course, but he couldn't be sure. First he thought one; then he thought another; and then he saw the same thing two nights later. Some scoundrel was letting down the birds out on the flyways, regular.

That afternoon Coving and Cumbey were both in camp when Lutton arrived. The fellow doing the shooting hadn't had time to come in. 'Course there was a chance he was working with a partner, but Coving and Cumbey were old-timers, working with Joe Welks. Joe came in about as soon as Lutton did, and so that let him out. Lutton knew he wasn't responsible, so that gave him four reliables. He told the boys what he had seen, and it made them look sick. Here they had been working right and square, same as agreed, but some blamed pirate was messing it all up.

Knowing what to expect, the four spread out the next day, keeping their eyes and ears open. Joe, that afternoon, had seen two birds crumple up and drop, which confirmed the story of Lutton, who might have been mistaken, though he was an old feather man. Joe slipped over to try and head the shooter, but couldn't locate anything. At the same time he located tracks and found a bird stuffed down into a hole, but a mink had smelled and dragged it out. It was shot.

Old swamp angels, seeing, hearing, smelling, the junglers closed in on the scoundrel. He was good, that feather crook. He knew the water and the

brakes and the air. First one, then another was suspected, but presently all four had an idea, which was the same. In came Sparks and he spoke up. He could always be depended on to say what he thought, when the time came.

"Look here," he said, finding the four playing poker in a cabin boat belonging to Humber. "I know for a fact we've a traitor. He's shooting outside. I don't know how he's doing it, without no gunshots, but I've found his dead birds, and I've found two trees he's shot from. Generally he locates sneak bird flyways, and shoots them low. But twice I've happened to be watching when he turned egrets into rags and feathers. I couldn't head him, on account of his coming in after dark, and all I know is, none of us here tonight is shooting. How about it?"

The four men looked at Humber. Sparks had him eliminated for sure, he said, and so they sat on the violations of their agreement.

"We're six to five, now," Sparks figured. "We can depend on probably three of the five being reliable and with us, if we locate them. I'm in favor of working—"

"We've been working."

Lutton indicated the card players, and Humber admitted he'd come to be suspicious, but hadn't actually seen anything. He just had a feeling about it, a kind of hunch. 'Course, he was on the lookout, just naturally. The shooter was working mornings in the east and evenings in the west, on account of it was harder to see into the sun than down the line of the shine. They all understood that.

"He's killing a lot of them," they all agreed with Lutton.

The birds weren't alarmed, and two of the boys knew he was shooting tail birds, which left the leader birds going in undisturbed, like shooting the lower wild turkeys in a flock by moonlight, working up, so the falling birds wouldn't scare the others.

OF COURSE, the little white cranes were an awful temptation for a man, if he needed money. All agreed to that. At the same time, even if a man was hard up, he ought to play square. The problem of who was cheating bothered the boys a lot. The principle of it was the worst. Two of the suspects were just youngsters. Boys don't have such high ideals as the older men. They'd need to be taught a lesson, prob'ly. The Darvels were brothers, hardly old enough to vote. They were market hunters who just happened to run into feathers. The old-timers had the luck to have these two men with them at the very moment five birds were seen to flop down—two, then two more, and finally one. That meant an automatic . . .

That settled it. Of those out at the moment, only this fellow from out the Ohio, the stranger, who went by the name of Picolilo, could have shot. It was a great relief to the watchers to find out it wasn't really a native who was violating the agreement. He was just one of those foreigners. He had to be taken care of, now that they had him dead to rights. They figured he must be using some newfangled kind of air gun, or maybe a noiseless as well as smokeless powder. It didn't make any difference, though, what he used.

Picolilo was the scoundrel. The question was how should he be taken care of? By this time the vigilance committee knew his habits. They had come upon seven or eight of his perches along the flyways, from which he dropped the feathers. He sat low, of course, and his blind was never against the skyline, where even his gun muzzle would be visible.

"Well, the first one who has a good chance better do him up," was the way the word went around. Only six were in on the business, for it wasn't any use having any more. So they left it that way.

One night Welks didn't come in. He wasn't in the following day either. That was something else again. The five who

remained were aware of what had happened, as if they had been present. Welks had come in on the violator, but lost out in the duel.

Two nights later Humber and Cumbey didn't return. Sparks, Lutton and Coving sat on that case. Coving was boiling. A man doesn't lose his partner, especially such a partner as Welks had always been, with any patience. Sparks and Lutton both warned him to take care, for it was plain that this scoundrel they were after had his suspicions and was on the lookout, himself. But Coving was a kind of wild fellow, and the next any one knew, Coving didn't show up.

Every one was talking now. The Darvels were superstitious and when they figured that four men were missing, they just pulled stakes and headed for some other part of the brakes. They had all they wanted. An outsider of the name of Stitts disappeared, and finally there weren't any left on Wildcat Ridge but Sparks, Lutton and Picolilo.

'Course, in one way, that was a shakedown, right. They all shared up the outfits of those who disappeared, counting out their feathers and choosing all around, drawing cuts for first, second, third choices. Picolilo drew long on Welks' and Humber's outfits but Sparks drew long on two of the others. Nobody turned his back on anybody, naturally. Sparks and Lutton didn't favor each other. That might have made Picolilo think something. It was a case of which would get the drop, that was all.

The way it broke was comical. Lutton and Sparks decided they better head right in and have it over. They couldn't quite bring themselves to shoot a man in the back, and they wanted this cheater to make the first move so their consciences wouldn't bother them. They both knew in their hearts what had happened. At the same time, they couldn't bring themselves to do cold killing without having an excuse. Lutton headed out before day one morning. Sparks followed. Picolilo headed away last. He thought he knew which way the two had gone, but he didn't. He climbed one of his sneaker flight blind trees and first thing he dropped four birds on the outflight. He didn't come down right away to pick up his birds. He was watching for another flight that came by the other side of his blind, and sure enough, he hit two more birds.

He picked up the first four birds, one after another, and then came over to harvest the two on the other side. He picked up one of these birds, which was a big one, a dandy with fifty-two feathers on it. He was smoothing the plumes before plucking them when he heard something.

Looking, he saw Sparks straight ahead of him, standing on a log with his back to him, looking the other way, peering and peeking the way a man would if he was looking for somebody.

Picolilo kinda laughed with that thin, snaky grin of his. He slipped the bird into his pocket, like putting away a revolver, and started to throw up his long barreled automatic. Before he could let go two charges of double B's hit him almost square in the back, driven by plenty of nitro. He was lifted right plumb off the ground and fell forward, dragging his legs, landing on his face, his gun pikepoling about twenty foot.

Yes, suh! It took an awful lot of nerve in Sparks to draw Picolilo's fire thataway, account of a feather hunter being about the fastest snapshot there is hunting. And Picolilo was as quick as he was treacherous. But Lutton was good himself. Sparks had plenty of confidence in him.

'Course, using an automatic thataway the action takes up lots of the noise. Picolilo worked far enough from camp so's he wouldn't be heard. And the way things worked out it was Picolilo that just didn't show up that night in camp. Accordingly, Sparks and Lutton whacked up on his outfit, same's if there'd been a divvy on the outfits of the others who had come to lie out in the brakes, never appearing again.

They had one dread, that the violator was hard up for money and was cheating

on account of that kind of troubling temptation. But, shucks! When they opened up the scoundrel's money belt he had better than fifty-six hundred dollars. He had laid away far more feathers than anybody else, shedders, let alone the two pounds he had killed. Besides he had come into a lot dividing the plumes of the men he'd outwitted and killed.

SPARKS and Lutton counted out, choosing alternately, and then they decided that as there were only two of them left, they might as well shoot, and being away back there'd be no one at hand to hear the low, crackling shots of their smokeless powder, using Picolilo's automatics. They just trimmed out enough of the birds to round out their tufts. Nights they talked about how careless Picolilo had been, shooting into the heads of flocks, scattering the bunches. If he'd just shot the tail enders the birds dropping behind wouldn't have exploded the gangs, attracting so much attention. He was just hogging, that's all, the leading birds being best for feathers.

The two came off the roost with seven pounds of feathers each, besides having all those fine, fancy guns, outfits and Picolilo's specials, and the loot he'd gathered off his victims, sneaking it into camp under his shooting clothes. 'Course, not wanting to attract too much attention, they just discarded the extra boats, being right careful in that particular.

But there was something funny about that feather shoot. One afternoon in the spring toward sundown a flock of geese came pounding north, gabbing and honking the way they do.

"Let's have a coupla roasts," Sparks suggested, and up they threw their guns.

Being old-timers, knowing the leaders would be tough and hard, they picked yearlings away back in the V-lines, taking just two. Compared to plumes at four hundred dollars a pound, it was plumb ridiculous thinking about goose down at seventy-five cents a pound, more or less. Same time, they were plucking the down, saving it in bags, when two Government bird wardens come in on them, 'way back there at the edge the brakes.

They'd seen those geese in the flock go sky highing, losing their formation. They thought something. They came sneaking and snooping along there, and came right out sticking up those two men shucking geese. They smiled, those game protectors did! Looking for feather stuffers, they were plumb satisfied. 'Course, they didn't take any chances on those old boys, but put handcuffs on them. Then they went looking for feather beds and shipping pillows.

They would have been plumb comical, too, the way they blinked and swallowed, when, instead of down, they found all those plumes! One was guarding, the other ransacking. That warden come out of Lutton's boat positively gulping with astonishment, holding those tufts of plumes. Fourteen pounds of egrets! Ho, law!

Caught dead to rights, with probably six thousand dollars' worth for seizing, those old feather hunters spent a lot of money keeping out of jail. Instead of making an awful big haul, they doggone near went broke financially. Spiritually, 'course, it sure broke up their sporting life. They couldn't plead they'd just picked shedders, account of all those shot feathers of Picolilo's, besides those last ones they'd hogged, cutting them with lead.

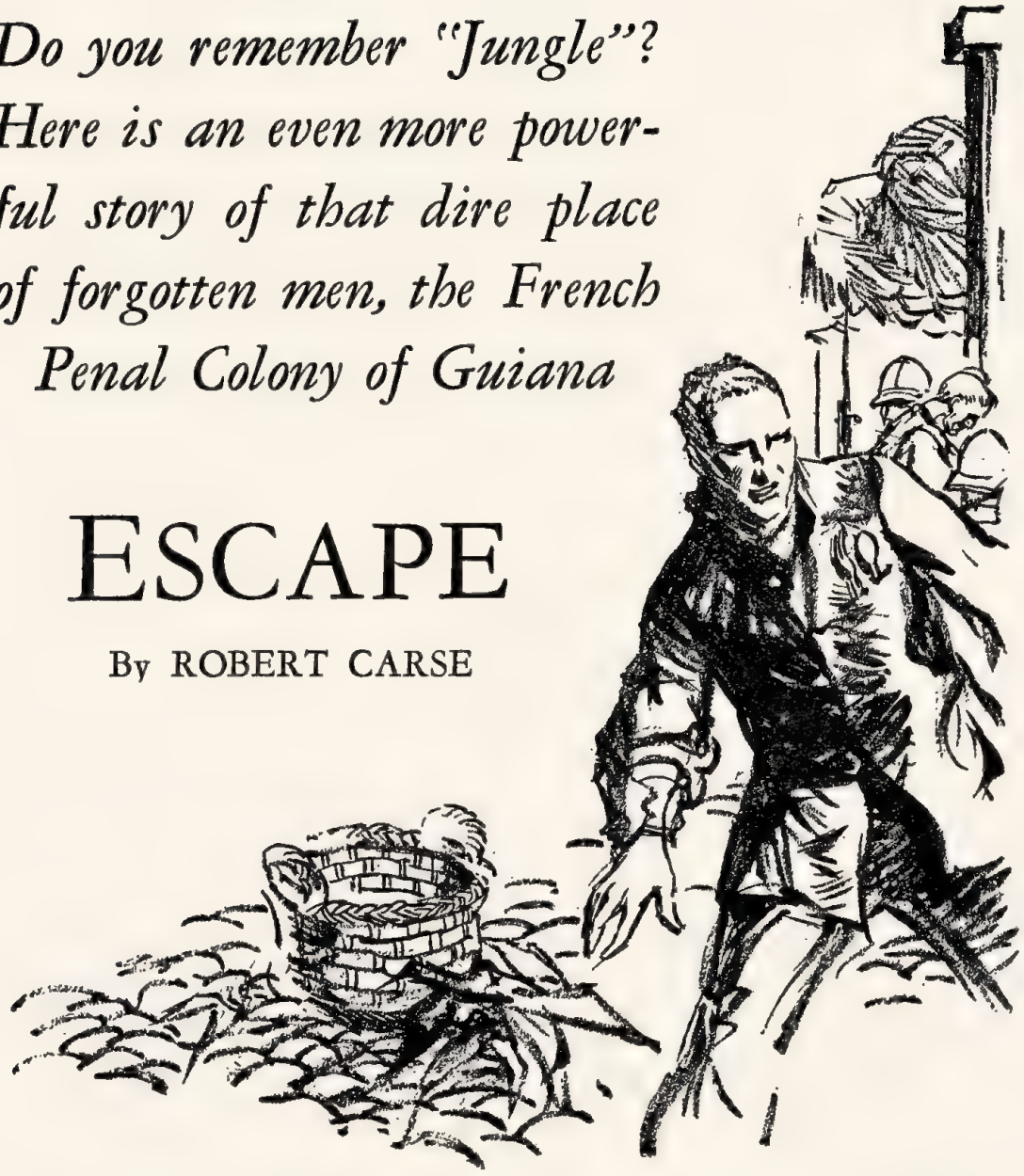
No, suh, feather hunting ain't what it used to be. In the first place, there's a bad element into it, unreliable, no sense of honor, an' hoggish. An' after you've made your haul, you can't place no reliance in your luck. Like's not, when you reckon you're safe, along comes the Government meddling and confiscating, lawing, fining, taking all the profits out, not to mention pestering a man into jail to boot.

At the same time, come to think about it, there's always comical aspects to it, any way you see one of those roost propositions.

Do you remember "Jungle"? Here is an even more powerful story of that dire place of forgotten men, the French Penal Colony of Guiana

ESCAPE

By ROBERT CARSE



OUTSIDE, furiously, the tropic rain drummed down into the courtyard; but through it Laman could hear them at their work—the barked shouts of the executioner, the rap of hammers, the creak of ropes and tackle as the last heavy beams of the guillotine were lifted into place.

Those sounds fascinated Laman. All night they had been going on, and all night he had been awake. It was within a half hour of dawn now. Within a half hour the "Squirrel", Pomeret, would die, make reparation for his killing of the quarter-breed Tonkinois guard who had taunted him beyond any shred of sanity.

Almost all the prison—nearly every one in the penal barracks of L'Ile de Nou—was aware that Pomeret was to die. Every one but Pomeret himself, and the other five white faced men in the condemned cells. That one of their number was going to be brought forth to pay for

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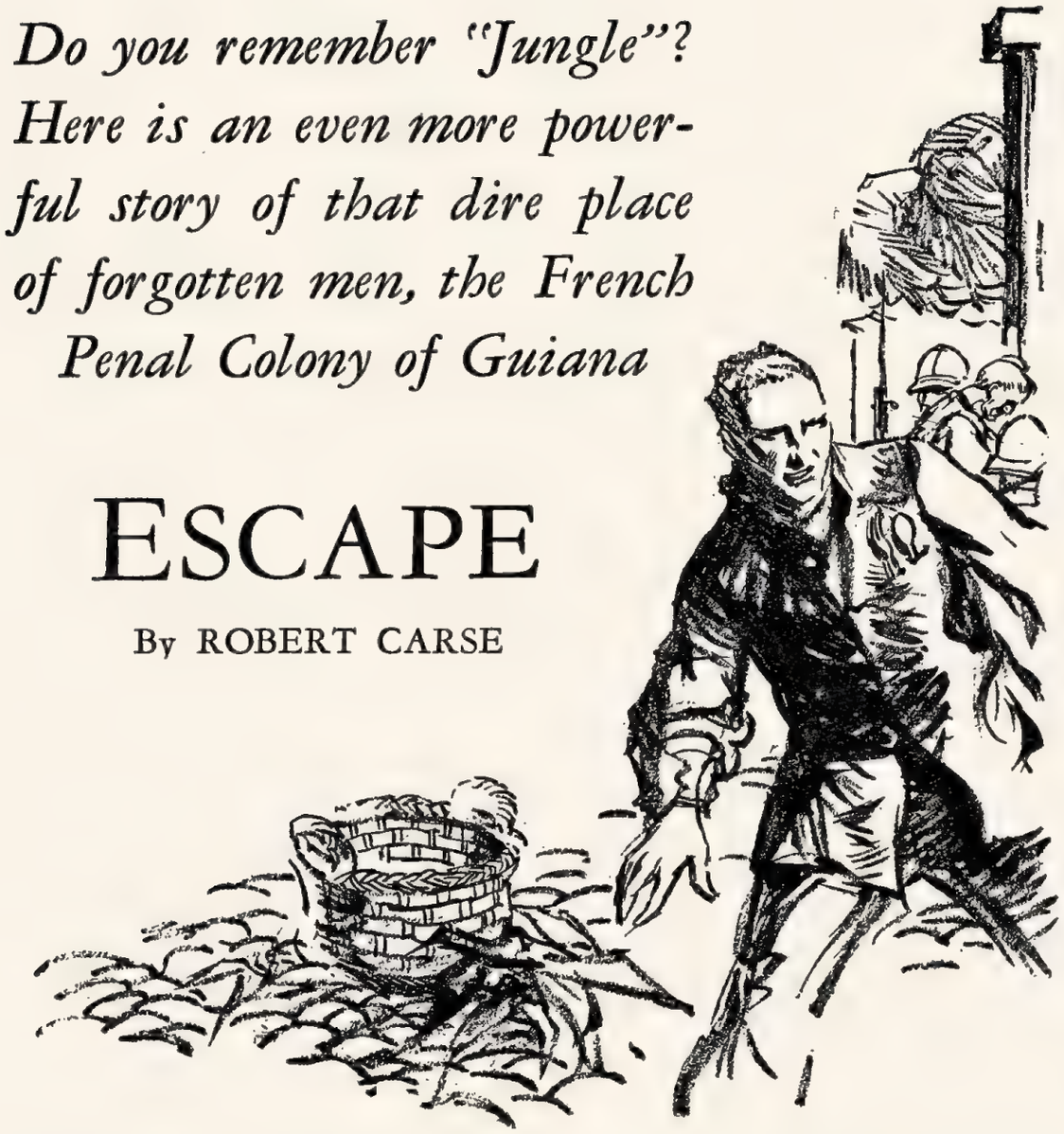

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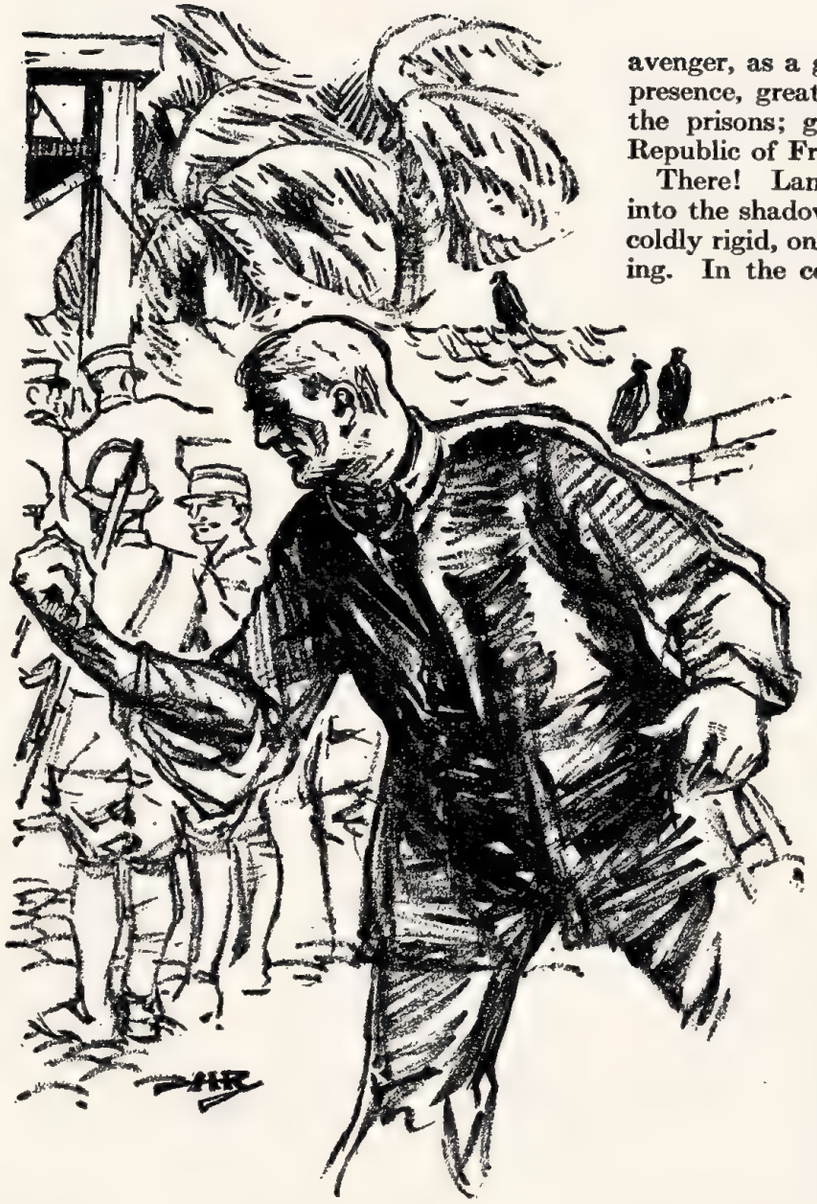

his crime at dawn all the six knew, for they, too, had heard the executioner and his assistants working in the courtyard throughout the long, rain-clamorous night. But which one? It was that which the six did not know, and that which was tearing at their brains with the sharp fangs of fear right now.

Name of a name, of a sacred name! Laman uttered it whisperingly aloud—not as a curse, but as a sort of involuntary prayer—to the God he knew only as an avenger, as a grim and terrible omnipresence, greater than the director of the prisons; greater, even, than the Republic of France itself . . .

There! Laman drew back farther into the shadows of his wooden bunk, coldly rigid, only his bright eyes moving. In the covered corridor outside tramped a small body of men; through the bars of the big cell block he could see them. First, in gleaming solar helmet and perfect whites, the square shouldered commandant of the prison. At his heels, the Marist priest, head bowed, hands crossed on the breast of his dark robe. Behind him, Bachin, the dog faced executioner.

They were past; had turned the corner into the corridor of the condemned cells. Laman swung forward, careful not to wake the sleeping men about him. The guillotine was finished now; the work on it had halted, and he could hear almost perfectly what went on before condemned cell No. 3.

Heavy keys clanking; that was the "screw" opening the cell door. Then the commandant's voice—

"C'est pour ce matin, Pomeret!"

A low, a terrible cry from Pomeret. A growl from the guard in warning to the frantic man. A moment's silence. The soft intonations of the Marist brother, attempting to make peace with Pomeret's God for him—that God which the Squirrel did not know any better than he, Laman. Another silence. The executioner was doing his work now, cutting

his crime at dawn all the six knew, for they, too, had heard the executioner and his assistants working in the courtyard throughout the long, rain-clamorous night. But which one? It was that which the six did not know, and that which was tearing at their brains with the sharp fangs of fear right now.

Name of a name, of a sacred name! Laman uttered it whisperingly aloud—not as a curse, but as a sort of involuntary prayer—to the God he knew only as an avenger, as a grim and terrible omnipresence, greater than the director of the prisons; greater, even, than the Republic of France itself . . .

There! Laman drew back farther into the shadows of his wooden bunk, coldly rigid, only his bright eyes moving. In the covered corridor outside tramped a small body of men; through the bars of the big cell block he could see them. First, in gleaming solar helmet and perfect whites, the square shouldered commandant of the prison. At his heels, the Marist priest, head bowed, hands crossed on the breast of his dark robe. Behind him, Bachin, the dog faced executioner.

They were past; had turned the corner into the corridor of the condemned cells. Laman swung forward, careful not to wake the sleeping men about him. The guillotine was finished now; the work on it had halted, and he could hear almost perfectly what went on before condemned cell No. 3.

Heavy keys clanking; that was the "screw" opening the cell door. Then the commandant's voice—

"C'est pour ce matin, Pomeret!"

A low, a terrible cry from Pomeret. A growl from the guard in warning to the frantic man. A moment's silence. The soft intonations of the Marist brother, attempting to make peace with Pomeret's God for him—that God which the Squirrel did not know any better than he, Laman. Another silence. The executioner was doing his work now, cutting

away the neck of Pomeret's canvas jumper so that the knife . . . lashing his hands loosely but securely behind his back; lashing the feet so that he could just walk . . .

Other heavy booted feet echoed down the concrete corridor; drums beat stirringly in command; guards were at the doors of the cell block now, shouting, shoving at the sleepy ones. Sullenly they fell into line, answered to their names, marched out in squads of four down the steel steps, through one corridor, another, then out into the rain of the courtyard.

Laman's squad fell in at attention within five yards of the stone base of the guillotine. Close at hand stood their white clad guards, fingers on the butts of their revolvers, holster flaps open. In a hollow square, at strict attention in the rain, stood a company of *tirailleurs*, bayoneted and loaded rifles in their right hands, a living wall of death between those who stood so stiffly in waiting before the guillotine and the high white wall of the courtyard.

Inch by inch, Laman turned his head so that he might stare about him, for never had he seen an execution by the knife, although eleven of his twenty-six years had been spent in prisons, in France, and here, in New Caledonia.

Directly ahead was the guillotine, which, mentally, he had seen built all during the night. Just to his right was a small wooden platform graced by three plain chairs and the white uniformed figures of three men. The director of penal administration, red eyed, red faced, his body a square, stolid block of flesh upholding the square, thick block of the somber head. The procurator-general, a dainty man, with down curving nose, small eyes, the mouth of an adolescent boy and the mannerisms of a cabaret *gigolo*—a soft silk handkerchief drooping from his tunic cuff. Then the *greffier*, the clerk of the maritime tribunal, a misplaced old soldier, mustache like a small black bar of metal across his thick jawed face, official papers held clumsily in blunt hands, the *Medaille Militaire*, Tonking and Colonial ribbons across his tunic breast.

These, Laman told himself, staring, were the rulers of L'Ile de Nou. Under them, under their tremendous power of life, death and hope of freedom, lived nine thousand men and women, the dregs, the outcasts and habitual criminals of the Republic of France. And two of that three seemed as hard bitten, as careless of life and death, as those whom they ruled.

METAL squealed; the steel door at the end of the courtyard swung open. Laman's eyes swerved, to steady. Leading, the commandant of the prison, swaggering just a little, eyes staring straight before him. At his shoulder, the thin, tubercular *chef des surveillants*, trying now, before the rulers of this place, to imitate the military swagger of his superior. Behind, head still bowed, hands still crossed, the Marist father and, stumbling at his heels, gasping, moaning, Pomeret, the Squirrel, supported and pushed along by the executioner and his smirking assistant.

An involuntary cry wrenched from Laman—

"Pomeret, my old one . . ."

The big *surveillant*, who stood just ahead of him, swung around, backhanding covertly.

"Silence, you!"

Laman reeled from the blow, almost fell, blood leaping from his cut lips. Strong hands caught at him from behind, shoved him back into the ranks. Over his shoulder, hissingly—

"*Saligaud!*"

The big guard wheeled, lips back from his teeth, eyelids narrowed evilly.

"Was that you, stinking offal of a camel?"

"Me—*malabar* Guimerot, thou never clean son of a goat!"

From those hardened ones in the second rank came a low, unmusical ripple of approval. A fitting time for the swine of a guard to be cheeked by old Guimerot, *malabar* and brutal bully that he was.

The *surveillant* had thrust his body hard up against Laman's, was leaning over to get his eyes directly on the face of the self-proclaimed bully and bad man.

"Silence!"

It was the *chef des surveillants*, face unnaturally flushed, eyes small hot points of mad lights. The guard snapped back into position, chin up, head back, hands stiff by his sides. Laman licked his bleeding lips and looked up, forgetting what had just happened in what was before him.

Pomeret was on the platform of the guillotine now, the Marist father at his side, the executioner and his bald headed assistant close behind. But no longer did the Squirrel tremble and gasp out. His colorless face was calm; his pale eyes were placid pools in which Laman believed he saw amazed ecstasy. He cursed to himself without sound. *Hélas*, Pomeret, he was to die like a real rough one, then?

In Paris, in the old days on the Place Pigalle, he had known Pomeret; they had stolen buns and rides together, fought for each other implicitly and unsparingly. But Pomeret had been a year or so older than he, had been an orphan; the gang claimed him first. And on his third job Pomeret had been caught, sentenced to two years. He did his bit, came out, met his old girl, got drunk and forgetful, planned a new job and confided the details of it to a café hanger-on who turned out to be a *mouchard*, a police stool-pigeon.

For that the Squirrel had been given seven years; when it was over the prison virus was in his blood, and crime was his life. He had been more careful then, but one of the *malabars* of the gang slipped up somewhere in the details of a Chantilly second story job, and the Squirrel had been caught, sentenced as a hopeless criminal to New Caledonia for life.

And in less than five minutes he was to die by the guillotine for killing a mad, homicidal Tonkinois guard with his two bare hands. They were reading his death sentence now. Monsieur the ex-soldier clerk of the maritime tribunal had just stentoriously uttered the last line . . . To the director, the commandant had handed up his warrant of execution, then turned to bellow—

"Kneel and uncover!"

Down on their knees, wide brimmed, soggy straw hats in their hands, all, like pale faced, wondering Laman, with their eyes lifted to the calm eyes of him who was now to die . . .

From the guillotine platform the Marist father had stepped down, to stand statue-like at the ladder foot.

"Guillaume Pomeret, condemned to die, have you any word to say—now?"

It was the commandant, glowering up at him, so still, so calm.

"No, m'sieur. Nothing . . . "

Without gesture, without expression, as if, thought Laman, he were refusing a cigaret, a *vermuth cassis*.

The commandant's heavy eyes swerved about to the executioner's. Hardly above a hoarse whisper, he uttered the one word—

"*Vite!*"

With a slight push the executioner sent Pomeret forward on the smooth clean wood of the plank. The assistant stepped forward to his superior's side. The plank swung up and in. A sharp click as the *lunette* frame settled into place just behind the base of Pomeret's neck.

Laman's lips opened wide; he gulped for air. Pomeret's eyes were fixed full upon him, and those eyes were already those of a dead man—without prescience, without sparkle of life.

He could stand no more. His own eyes shut; a shuddering passed over his body. High and quick, drums beat and rolled. The death roll. Pomeret . . .

The sound of the falling knife was a skirring whine of metal along greased wood. A thud. A slight bumping noise. Complete and awful silence. Against his will, Laman's eyes dragged open.

His lips opened; his constricted throat muscles loosened. From his blood caked lips issued a mad cry of horror. He slid sidewise on his face to the rain cool concrete of the courtyard, consciousness blackly going from him.

BACK in the *case*, the main cell block, they kicked and pummeled him into consciousness. He said nothing, made no appeal or remonstrance, knowing well what would happen if he did. Silently he fell into rank after gulping down his black coffee and chunk of sour black bread which was his breakfast. Guards barked; they swung forward in a column of twos toward the outside, the rain, the malarial jungle and ten hours of back breaking labor with pick and shovel.

At the gate a scar faced corporal of guards checked them out, seeing that each man bore his own pick and shovel, his prison serial number burned on the hafts. Laman did not look up or murmur when the belligerent little man poked at him when he failed to sing out his number; he was in a careless lethargy of mind and spirit, little aware of where he was or what he was doing.

Only vaguely did he see the rain-dark backs of the men ahead of him in the straggling formation; and only by instinct did he keep in step, wooden soled sandals slurring over the rugged cobbles of the convict built road.

"*Halte-là!*"

They halted, thankfully. But their rest was only for a moment. Immediately came the order to work and, leadenly, they fell to it, beginning where they had left off yesterday—and ten paces from where they would end tonight. In twenty-two years, under the work of twelve thousand hands, this road had only progressed seven miles.

The rain sheeted down, warm, wearying. Already they were soaked through to the skin, and up from them rose a sweet, heady stink of unwashed bodies. The *surveillants*—the two detailed to watch them—had withdrawn from the edge of the road, seated themselves with their black rubber ponchos high above their necks, big black umbrellas spread to withhold the rain drops that might drip through the coco palm fronds above them. But their eyes were ever active, and across their knees were their loaded Lebel carbines—always ready for use.

Laman, eager to be alone, moved away from the rest and began to make a weak pretence of building up a ditch shoulder on the far side of the road. He had worked so for perhaps ten minutes when he sensed another man approaching him, could hear the clack of his wooden soled sandals on the crushed stone of the roadway. Over his shoulder, nervously, Laman looked up. The other was the apelike Guimerot, bully of the main barracks, who, by his own declaration, was the toughest man in all New Caledonia, and had, as basis for his declaration, the stories of others who had served with him in the *Bataillon d'Afrique* of the Light Infantry in Morocco, and had seen him in action there.

To his surprise, the *malabar* did not say anything, just settled to work beside him, heaving up great shovel loads of sand and gravel with a dexterous flip of his wrists. Laman licked his lips, looked up repeatedly at the other man. This was not natural; the strongest, the toughest man in the whole *bagne*, did not come to help the weakest and most insignificant. Usually the *malabar* hunkered down in the shade, or out of the wet, as the guards did, and saw to it by threat of physical violence that others did his work for him—and thanked him for the privilege.

Guimerot was singing now in a not unpleasant bass; singing the somehow always bawdy sounding and belligerent marching tune of the *Bat' d'Af'*:

> "*Trabaja la moukere,*
> *Trabaja bonno . . .*"

Line after line of it, rising, falling, ending at last in a long low howl of derision at the world, the Republic of France in particular. For a minute or so then Guimerot worked in silence beside him. Suddenly, totally without warning—

"How would you like to escape from this cesspool, Calf's Brains?"

Laman's mouth fell slack, his eyes stared, he stopped work.

"Work on, witless," snapped the *malabar* in a harsh whisper. "I don't want

those smart mugs over there to know I'm talking to you."

Only then did Laman marshal coherency.

"I'd rather not talk with you, Guimerot."

"Yah-hah!" Guimerot laughed, and the sound was almost that of the barking of a dog. "You don't believe in what I just said, then?"

"No! *Mon Dieu*, no!"

"An optimist, huh? Think you'll get your pardon for good conduct, be rehabilitated, allowed to go back to France and the old mother in the Place Pigalle, so?"

Laman straightened up, stared at the other appealingly.

"Sacred name, how did you find that out, Guimerot?"

Guimerot's scarred and pocked face broke for a moment in a sardonic smile.

"Ain't I the bully boy of this *case?* Don't mugs come running to me just to tell me things, like you used to say your prayer at your mama's knee?"

LAMAN could do nothing but nod; some member of his old gang must have been pumped by his hulking bully beside him. Perhaps Pomeret, before he had killed the Tonkinois, had, too, been dreaming of this thing that Guimerot had just mentioned.

"Listen!" husked the *malabar*, bending low over his shovel handle and keeping a steady stream of dirt flying while he spoke. "Let's have it out right now. I'm busting out of here, and you're going with me!"

"Me?" Laman forced himself to be articulate for a moment. "Me? You don't want me, in the name of God, no!"

"I want you—yes! And you talk too loud like that again, I'll break all your fingers tonight in dormitory . . . I want you—no one else."

"But why not one of those others—one of the tough ones?" Laman asked desperately.

"Huh! Just because of that—too tough; would turn on me and squeal for their own good, in hopes of a commutation—the rats. You? No."

"You're sure of me?" breathed Laman amazedly.

"Sure? Yeah . . . I'm sure of you, Calf's Brains. You ain't got the guts to play *mouchard* on me. I know that."

"How? How?" Laman's wonder and fear was childlike.

Again that terrible laugh came from Guimerot.

"Because if you don't, I'll see that you die as Pomeret, your old mate, died this morning!"

"He—he murdered a man. I have done nothing."

"Bah!" It was as if Guimerot had spit in the other man's face. "Don't you think that my gang—some of those mugs over there—wouldn't help me frame you in a murder, testify against you at the Maritime Tribunal?"

As a wounded animal might, Laman sprang back from the other man and half raised his shovel.

"Go ahead," whispered Guimerot calmly, tauntingly. "Go ahead! And tonight, in barracks . . ."

Laman's fingers relaxed; the shovel slipped again to the wet sand. He closed his eyes, fighting with all his mental strength to keep his sanity.

It had been this—this, all his life, ever since the gang had taken him in back in Paris, twelve and a half years ago. Now? No—he would not! He had only five years to go, and then he might appeal for his *rémission*, for retrial, on the strength of his good conduct, for his rehabilitation as a citizen, a free man . . .

This grinning beast beside him here was a lifer, could never hope for freedom, except through mad escape. And no one man had ever lived to escape from L'Ile de Nou. No one man . . . Guimerot must know that; must listen to that. And then, to Laman, came thought of Guimerot's face as he had last spoken to him—and of the all too possible threat he had made; and then a vision of the Squirrel's face this morning, staring at

him through the square little window of the *lunette.*

No, again he was trapped and beaten by forces greater than himself; again his love of life, his hope of eventual freedom and peace must forever force him to agree to something he feared and hated . . .

He turned, searching for the words, eager to placate and assure this man he so feared.

"Guimerot—"

The *malabar* had swung from him, was staring down the reddish stone of the road toward the dim white huddle of the prison.

"Not now—" over his shoulder, without turning his head. "Keep your head shut or you'll lose it, as I told you. Get me?"

"Yes!"

Laman, too, gaped down the red road through the glistening, tenebrous curtain of the rain. On that road marched a straight, commanding figure, helmet and uniform shielded by the unmistakable black umbrella of a guard. Suddenly Laman noticed that their usual two guards under the tree had got to their feet, were arranging tunics, ponchos and helmets. One by one, across, walking catlike and furtively, came five of the older, more seasoned lifers, men who had ruled here in the main prison before Guimerot had come out from Africa to wrest their power from them with the greater strength of his two hands.

"Who is it?" asked Guimerot now, as the half dozen grouped themselves loosely about him, still making some pretense at work.

"Lecomte," answered one, a broken nosed man. "I know his step, the walking excrescence!"

"So? Come for me, huh?" Guimerot straightened to his full height and, under his wet canvas jumper, Laman could see the great shoulder and back muscles flex and swell.

"Bah! Keep your shirt on, *joyeu!*" grunted the one with the broken nose. "He's come to square up for the beefing you gave him this morning at the execution. You open your head in reply, he'll see to it very well that you serve a nice piece in the black place—*le cachot noir!*"

"He will, huh?" asked Guimerot softly, and shook his head as a bull in the ring might on receiving the first sharp thrusts of the barbs.

"You're a thick headed fool," said the man with the broken nose.

"A fool—maybe so," snapped Guimerot, hands free from the haft of his shovel now. "But a tougher man than him, the swine!"

TO THIS there was no reply. Lecomte, the big guard, was within ten paces of the little group of convicts now. At his heels, in silent understanding, walked the other two *surveillants,* Lebel carbines in their hands, index fingers loosely about the trigger guards of their pieces. Mechanically, the group began to work again—all but Guimerot. He lounged with sullen indifference upon the handle of his pick.

Directly in front of him the three guards stopped, Lecomte a pace or so ahead.

The guard's long, horselike face was livid with rage; his eyes were slits of blazing fire between his narrowed lids; even now his hairy hands opened and shut with eagerness. The blazing eyes traveled up and down Guimerot's motionless form.

"Get to work, you!"

Guimerot did not move. Lecomte repeated it. The *malabar* made no movement, no gesture, kept his flaming eyes fixed on the big guard's face. Lecomte turned his head, nodded to his companion.

"You see?" he asked softly. "He does not work when ordered."

He turned back to Guimerot.

"Put your back into it, you fester!"

Then Guimerot spat, and the saliva splattered across the instep of Lecomte's boot. A great howling laugh of triumph came from Lecomte.

"You saw that?" he asked with forced calmness of his two companions. Without word, they nodded.

Then, his great eagerness, his bestial desire to show himself the physical superior of this man breaking through his unnatural calm, Lecomte advanced another pace, so that he was only a scant foot or so from the livid, tensely set *malabar*.

"A tough man, hey, Guimerot?"

From Guimerot broke the mad words—"Tougher than you!"

"Oh ho! He is a tough man! A real *malabar!* Tough behind the bars, *n'est-ce pas?* But—tough here? What holds you back, bad one? Afraid of me—afraid I'll hurt you?"

The veins on Guimerot's neck were a blue network.

"Its solitary in the "black" for two years, at least, if I hit you—you know that, swine!"

"And if I hit you first, I lose my *galons*, my rating, no?"

"What? With your mates to lie for you and to say that I hit you first? You stench of a stench!"

Within Lecomte's brain something snapped then, and what sanity that had withheld him, slipped away like a loosed cloak. He kicked and struck at the same time.

From those two the others leaped back as they would from striking snakes, and Laman saw indistinctly what happened. But that—Guimerot ducking the boot toe, throwing the other with an Egyptian wrestler's trick, learned in the dives of the Zgag Chergui in Ain Saffra. Throwing him, then stamping on his face with both wooden soled sandals before the other two amazed *surveillants* could rush in with reversed carbines and beat him into bloody insensibility . . .

Laman told himself, staring, that for this Guimerot would receive the maximum sentence of two years in the black cell. Alone, in complete darkness, two years . . .

Warm tears started in the corners of his eyes; he almost cried aloud in joy. Two years—of peace, for him. Two years Guimerot would be away from him, would not be forcing him on toward that desperate *impasse* called escape.

Afterward? When Guimerot came out again? Pray God that he, Laman, would be in another prison, in some other camp on the island, or that the *malabar* would be sent at once to Kutos and the camps of the incorrigibles—where they would not come together again.

But now, peace. He looked down at the crushed, featureless face of Lecomte, and in his eyes was an expression of thankfulness, of infinite gratitude.

Somewhere a high pitched siren had shrieked. Other guards, umbrellas discarded, came lurching down the unfinished road, rifles at the hip. Eagerly Laman obeyed them, fell in rank, marched off, wide eyes on the forms of the two unconscious men borne at the head of the column by six chosen convicts.

Back in the dormitory, fighting began as soon as the guards had slammed and locked the doors; other men were eager for Guimerot's position, his privileges, his petty grafts. But Laman sat away from them, uncaring, unnoticing, knees drawn far up under him, repeating to himself feverishly his little litany—peace, safety, peace . . .

Perhaps it was so written by Fate; Laman never knew—Guimerot never knew. But those two years passed and, at the end of them, on the evening of the first day of the beginning of the third year, Jacques Guimerot, *matriculaire* No. 32,679, came back into the same prison he had left for the black cells two years before—the same prison which Henri Louis Laman had not left during that time.

AT NIGHT, at half past five, when he came slogging wearily in with the rest of the road gang, Laman saw him, Guimerot, sitting there in his bunk—white, drawn, terribly thin, but still Guimerot, still his master. It was like a bad vision. Laman shut his eyes; opened them. But Guimerot was still there, staring at him with those terrible eyes that had stared blankly into darkness for two years, but still feared no living thing, and nothing dead.

Brokenly, as he passed toward his own bunk to get his tin bowl and cup for his supper rations, Laman tried to greet the other man, tell him that he was glad he was back. Guimerot did nothing but smile at him in silence; his whole attention was fixed on the new *malabar*, the man who had taken his place as bully, and his inalienable privileges.

About Guimerot were gathered a scant dozen of the old-timers, those who had known him in his gangster days in Paris, in his soldiering days in the *Bat' d'Af'*, and in those mad red days when he had led them against the guards in the battalion penal barracks at Biribi. Men, who, after their fashion, liked and respected him. But they, too, now stepped back, having learned a new lesson in the years since Guimerot had been gone.

Guimerot looked up, but still sat quietly on his wooden bunk rim. Before him, stripped to the waist, close shaven skull thrust forward, was El Rawana, the new Arab half-breed *malabar*, former irregular camel corps trooper, sentenced for twenty years.

Guimerot, thought Laman, staring at them both from his bunk, was tough, was a brute of brutes, but his was an open brutality, founded on a basis of true strength and courage. While this other—Rawana, the Arab! Tall, thin, nose like a saber point, eyes like beads, mouth a long, lean slit of malevolent evil, the whole personality and posture that of a vulture, living by craft, stealth, and the power of his long fingered hands—that were never far from the converted spoon knife in the waistband of his trousers . . .

And now, once again, Guimerot, who had been so proud of it, was going to pay for his toughness, his arrogance of body and spirit.

"Guimerot, *non?*" El Rawana, the former camel driver, cocked his long, almost cadaverous skull on one side as he asked it. "Former boss of the bunch, the old *caïd*, so?"

"Me?" Guimerot's smile was without humor—an insult. "Me—I don't count. Let's talk about you, Dusty; I ain't seen a cross between a goat and a mountain sheep in so long I'm homesick!"

As he spoke, he sprang, weak hands tearing at the other's throat desperately. But El Rawana was like a great desert cat. From that attack he spun and swerved back, met it with a knee, the bare sharp point of his elbow. The knee blow missed, was a little high, caught Guimerot in the pit of the stomach. But the elbow thrust was shrewd, perfect; it rebroke Guimerot's nose. The former bully fell, moaning through set teeth; mechanically covered his head with his hands and arms, drew his knees up high against his stomach, and lay waiting for the kicking which was not long in coming.

El Rawana kicked once more for pleasure, turned and looked about him, somewhat as a vulture on a desert battlefield. When he spoke it was in the bastard French Colonial *patois* of the camel corps and the Legion, but all there understood.

"Me—Rawana—*caïd* of *caïds!* You see?"

They had seen, and said nothing, sitting with outward stoicism on the edges of their bunks. Then El Rawana laughed. He turned to the nearest man, hands close at his sides.

"Cigaret—wine! *Vite!*"

And that man, without word, without hesitation, handed over his half liter of weak red wine, his black cigarets, which represented to him the savings of months. Laman opened and shut his sweaty hands, murmuring confusedly to himself. Three more years—three more years and he would be free of this place. Only three, then . . .

But still, when darkness had come, and the Arab could not see clearly which man it was, Laman crept from his bunk to where Guimerot lay, picked him softly up, dragged him to his bunk, dumped him in, bathed the bloody, swollen face and back, then slipped away before the *Bat' d'Af'* man regained sensibility. Later that night, hunched sleeplessly in his bunk, he asked himself why he had done

it, why he had aided the man he so hated and feared. He could find no answer, except that Guimerot possessed that animal courage and ability to take punishment which he himself lacked.

At dawn, when the drums rolled for a new day, Guimerot rose also, tramped stolidly forth to work, shouldering with a small grunt of pain the pick and shovel he had not used for two years. All during that day, all during the next two weeks, Laman stared at the former *malabar* with furtive, fearful eyes, expecting that again he would single him out, propose anew that insane plan of escape.

At last, though, understanding came to him; Guimerot was waiting, strengthening himself, training himself for his inevitable second battle with the half-breed, from which he would either issue forth a hopelessly crushed wreck of a man, or greater than ever, master of the barracks for indefinite time to come.

THAT fight began when, with a sure, sly gesture, Guimerot stole the Arab's coveted knife from his waistband as they stood in line in dormitory, waiting for supper. At once El Rawana swung, ducked, fell away, caught a little off his guard, but really not yet conquered. But Guimerot was right at his heels, and at the base of the half-breed's neck was his own knife point. El Rawana believed two things: that Guimerot, with his past record, could not afford to kill him; and that, if he used his wily tongue, he might talk the other off his guard, and then regain the precious knife.

He halted, turned, a simulated smile which was a grimace about his thin lips.

"The knife is thine, and well done, *bagnard!* But a soldier of Africa does not fight with a knife?"

Guimerot said nothing; he put the knife in the waistband of his trousers and slapped El Rawana's face—a gesture, a supreme gesture, befitting a recrowned king. El Rawana was no fool, and fought with the great craft of a secret coward. He stepped back from the other man, uttering a cry of pain, hands to his face. Rapidly, with more eagerness than caution, Guimerot followed him across the black painted concrete floor.

With the speed of light the Arab dropped to the floor, swiveled on hands and knees, lashed out with one heavily shod foot. The blow caught Guimerot just below the right knee cap; all but crippled him. He half fell, catching himself with his hands. Then El Rawana was upon him, crying out in his high, mad voice.

Away from him Guimerot rolled, employing the same sort of Arab wrestling tricks the other man used. With a snake's swiftness the Arab followed, lunging down and in. That Guimerot, a Frenchman, was a possessor of the trick which he then used, Rawana did not know or he would never have attacked.

Halfway up to meet him rose Guimerot, his one leg now all but paralyzed. A fraction of a moment too late the Arab divined the trap the other had so cleverly laid for him, tried to spring back from it. But already Guimerot's tremendous hands were on his hands, clenched with the grip of death; already Guimerot's superior weight and strength were pulling him inexorably and swiftly down. And Guimerot's one good leg was out stiff and ramrod-like—aimed directly at his groin . . .

El Rawana screamed like a mortally wounded horse. His hands fluttered over his body; blood spurted from his lips where his teeth had cut them. He rolled over and over, back and forth; at last was still. For a moment, silence. Then Guimerot's voice, the old voice of command, which had not been heard in this place for two years:

"Calf's Brains! Yeah, you, Laman, go and get the swine's bottle and cigarets from his bunk! Jump!"

Laman, white faced, glassy eyed, came racing back, bearing the liter of wine, the packet of cheap prison canteen cigarets. Gulping, Guimerot drank, wiped his lips, then passed the bottle to the closest man. He lighted a cigaret, sent the remainder

of the packet on. Man by man, smiling, the dormitory went to bed. Old Guimerot was back.

In the morning when the guards came to rout them out, they found El Rawana in a deserted corner. They cursed and questioned, took a half dozen of the weaker, more talkative ones to the commandant's office for cross-examination. But none of them knew anything—not even Laman, who realized that now again Guimerot would come to him, force him toward that mad gamble with death or perpetual imprisonment which was called escape.

A month went by. The rainy season ended. The sun burned down parchingly. Then Guimerot, a stronger, a greater man than ever, came to Laman, the weakest. Came at night, when no one but themselves was awake in the *case*, the others sleeping in a lethargy of exhaustion which was very like the sleep of death.

They spoke in low, broken whispers. At first it was only the *malabar*, Guimerot, who talked:

"We, you and me, are leaving here soon, kid. You know, I talked to you about it before. We been held back two years, but that's all right."

Piteously, almost sobbing, Laman answered him, pleaded to be let alone, to serve out his time quietly, to wait for his chance to become a *concessionaire*, thus begin the peaceful path to eventual freedom. Guimerot laughed at him.

"I'm good natured with you, kid, but I'll waste a little wind on you. I got to get out—and will. But—me? All hands watch me Guimerot, the king, around here. You? No one watches you. That's why I picked you. And you yap about waiting for pardon. How many mugs have got it in the last four years?"

"Four."

"One a year huh? And you think you'll be one of the four? Out of about a hundred guys in the place that got the same whack at it you got? A swell chance! You got any friends in the government?"

"No. None."

"GOD HELP you for a lost soul then! You'll be all of ten more years getting out. But, that's all idle wind, and beside the point. Get this, I'm going out—over the wall. And you're going with me—as far as the wall, at least. For that I need a rope, and you, to get the rope. Make it, hide it, until our time comes. Me, I'm a lifer; I ain't got a chance to be freed from this place, not even what little chance you have. The gang, they want me back. I'm a tough guy, a good man on a strong arm or safe blowing job, and they know it."

"You mean . . ."

"You know what I mean!" Guimerot's hands licked out in the dark and closed in a terrific vise upon Laman's arms. "Kid, I can't stand this dump; it's driving me nuts; I'll bump a guard soon—as I almost did Lecomte. Don't argue, listen. They say no one guy has ever jumped out of here. Well, they're right. But no guy ever went about it the right way . . . Ever hear of Eddie Guerin?"

"The mug who pulled that big New York job? Tried to pull the Express job in Paris? Who was shipped to Guiana?"

"Him. Remember how he made his bust out of the Isle of Silence?"

"A boat—a small ship, friends. You—Oh, Guimerot, you ain't—"

"Easy, easy, witless! Yes, I have. Been planned for two years. It ain't so hard to get letters in and out of here, through free colonists the government sends out to this place to farm it, and then who go back, busted. Some of them don't sneeze at a thousand francs—get me?"

"Yes."

"Pipe down and listen to me; I can read you like the *greffier* reads them death papers. You're worrying about when you get back, ain't you? About the old mother and all that. I'll fix that. I'll put ten thousand francs in your kick—before we pull out of here. A little dough like that don't mean much to me and the gang, but it will mean a lot to you and the old mother, won't it, huh?"

"Of course! Sacred name, you'll drive me mad with all this wild talk, Guimerot!"

"Keep your shirt on, kid; it ain't wild. How about you and the old lady ducking out and into Poland, into Warsaw, when you get back? The bulls can't get you then."

"Guimerot," said Laman simply, knowing no other words, "God help me, I'm your man!"

At that the *malabar* laughed, as he would at a new and excellent joke.

"No two ways for you, kid," he said, his whisper husky with repressed laughter. "Now—the real business. You know the wall? Down by the harbor? A rope to get over that. Three old spoons made into a hook, a sailor's grapnel, to catch on the top. The rope—any rope like the boys make in the prisons. Old scraps of cloth, pants, shirts, anything you can lay your hands on here in the jug, or along the road. Knot what you find here into strips—short ones—roll it inside your pants, around your shins, march out with it. Shed it out there and duck it; wait for a dark, rainy day, when the guards and the gang ain't so watchful, and splice all the short pieces into the one long one. Then hide it as you'd hide your own heart! You get me, Calf's Brains?"

A long shudder of anticipation and of hope was Laman's sole answer. For a moment, his face within two inches of the the other man's, Guimerot studied him and was satisfied for, without further word, with the stealth that was his by nature, he crept back to his own bunk.

That dawn, when Laman passed the corporal, pick and shovel on his shoulders, he limped just a bit, for inside his sandals were three shreds of cloth—two discarded shoe laces and an old bandage. At noon, squatting down for a moment in a familiar posture beside the road, he extracted them from his sandals, knotted them strongly together, hid them under loose sand.

Escape—and here the first step, the beginning of the rebirth of everything that remained clean and fine in his life. From day to day, and almost every day, for months, he added to his rope. Lashed strongly to one end were three bent spoons, given him by Guimerot at night, who had got them in turn through devious ways from the kitchen of the procurator-general.

These, worked at desperately in odd moments of solitude, were twisted and pounded into the shape of a rough but strong hook.

One dark, rainy dusk while Guimerot squatted between him and the weary members of the gang, Laman measured the rope surreptitiously, measuring as a sailor does, in bights that stretched from extended hand to hand.

A little sigh of amazement and joy came from him as he hid it away with swift caution. It was forty-two feet long; the wall was thirty-five feet high. They had enough, more than enough.

Strangely, there was no exultation within him, no excitement, only a great quiet. Waiting his chance, he scrambled rapidly up from his place of concealment in the ditch and paced slowly forward to the *malabar's* side.

ONLY then, when he saw Guimerot's agonized, excited face, his heated eyes and twitching lips, did Laman realize how much escape meant to this other man. Guimerot was like a caged jungle beast who at last sees before him a chance at that freedom which was once so gloriously his. At him Laman stared in wonder; he had thought his own desire for freedom overwhelming but beside this man's frantic desire, his paled into insignificance. But now Guimerot could contain himself no longer.

"The length—the length, stupid?"

"Forty-two feet. Plenty—more than plenty."

"Soul of a goat!" breathed Guimerot. "And now we must wait another week until our friend, the 'admiral,' comes from Australia for us. I did not think you would work so quickly and so well, Calf's Brains."

"Don't worry! God knows that I, too,

am almost mad to get out of this place. And they come from Australia for us, *hein?*"

"So. From a place called Port Moresby, in a fast seagoing launch—faster than the blessed patrol boat. They have seen to that."

For the first time without his usual savage malice, Guimerot smiled at the other, as an equal, a companion.

"But, here," husked the *malabar* suddenly. "Strike me if I ain't almost forgot it!"

One of his broad, brightly tattooed hands disappeared under the rear of his sweat stained jumper, reappeared. His hand met Laman's hand. The slighter man felt warm metal in his palm. He bent over, as if to tighten his sandal, and broke open the skillfully made *plan*—the precious aluminum capsule made and craftily kept by all old convicts.

From it projected a frayed edge of colored paper. His fingers trembling, Laman unrolled it, spread it quickly out. It was dirty, it was stained by many hands and many bodies, but it was a ten thousand franc note. Guimerot—he had made good his word.

Hurriedly, Laman refolded it into a tight wad, thrust it within the *plan*, hid the little receptacle itself. Then he turned to thank the other man. But Guimerot had stridden rapidly down the road from him, taken up shovel and pick and made his place in the ranks of the column reforming for the nightly march back to the prison. Dazed by his conflict of feelings, Laman shook his head, also took his place in ranks. One thing, one alone now, was ahead of him and Guimerot—escape.

One day, one night passed. Two, three, and on the fourth, after midnight, the *malabar* came slipping on silent feet through the sleepers to him, sat down beside him on his bunk. Only shortly did they talk—for a period of perhaps five minutes. But in that time they settled the last details. Two nights from now was the time. When the gang fell in for the march back to the prison they were to hold back, drop into the ditch alongside the road. The two *surveillants* in charge of their road gang were easy going, had never seen an escape even attempted during their service on L'Ile de Nou. They left the counting of their men until they reached the main prison gate, where the rigorous evening's search and count of each man was made.

It was in that time, maybe all of five minutes, that they, Guimerot and Laman, must run the some thousand yards to the high wall encircling the island, heave up their rope, swarm over—Laman going first, to help the now slightly lame *malabar*—and then rush down to where the small boat from the "admiral's" launch waited them. It was to be in that interval when the patrol boat was on the opposite side of the island.

"*C'est tout!*" rasped Guimerot. "You have it all—understand?"

"It is in my brain like fire!"

"Good. Until then, softly. You know?"

"I know."

"That is good."

Guimerot was gone.

The rest of that night and the following day went in dragging hours. Time and again Laman found himself looking at that high white wall, and at the blue flame of the sea beyond. The wall—the sea . . .

With its always amazing suddenness the tropic dusk fell. Within the prison drums rolled faintly, sounding the recall to the dormitory. Another day.

Laman watched Guimerot wipe the sweat from his sun dark face, fall into rank, tools on shoulder. He picked up his own, took his place.

The two guards were up from their resting places, shouting at the slow ones. The senior guard half opened his mouth to shout the order to march, then closed it. Laman watched him with fascination. The man's face was first white, then ruddily flushed with blood; his brown hand whipped at the bolt of his carbine, brought the piece up to his shoulder. He was firing shot after shot.

An excited cry broke from the other guard. He, too, heeled about, snapped up his weapon, fired. The blue clad column swung about, stared toward the wall, the sea.

There, reeling, weaving to and fro through the marsh grass, was a dungaree clad man—an escaping prisoner. Blood was dark on the back of his jumper, his legs tottered and almost gave beneath him in their new pain, but still he kept on toward the wall.

AT THE foot of it he fell, but rose swayingly to cast up his ragged line, weighted at one end by a bright hook made of three old spoons. At last the hook caught, the line tightened in his hands. Draggingly, he started up. But a half a dozen guards were firing now; the bullets sang and slapped in a deadly hail. He was not quite halfway to the top when he fell. The guards did not run toward him. They walked, and as they walked they laughed and joked about their marksmanship.

Laman tore away his eyes; raised them to Guimerot's, who had turned in the column to face him. A chill crept through his brain; all color left his face. Guimerot's eyes were those of a mad beast—a beast about to kill.

Half the night Laman sat trembling in his bunk, waiting, waiting. It was far past midnight when Guimerot came to him—but so silently and so swiftly that his hands were about Laman's throat before he could even begin to cry out.

Guimerot did not beat him there; he dragged him, half strangling, to the little concrete walled lavatory at the end of the cell block. In silence Guimerot went to work on him.

He twisted his right arm high up behind his back until the ligaments burned like fire and the bones creaked in agony. Then he threw him face forward, against the rough concrete of the wall. Kicked him when he remained prone and motionless . . .

But, at last, unable to contain himself any longer, he added words to his blows:

"The money—the money I gave you, where is it? Where is the money that one paid you for the rope? Speak! Speak—or I'll tear the nose from your face with my fingers!"

Laman's voice was a sobbing croak:

"I haven't it—I hid the *plan* along the road, afraid some one would steal it from me as I slept in here. Believe me, in the name of God!"

"Believe you!"

Guimerot beat him again; searched him; struck him repeatedly with the vicious cunning of a mad man. Laman made no outcry, no resistance. Once more the *malabar's* rage poured forth in speech:

"Tell me now—tell me, and I will break each rib separately—that you did not cross me—sell the rope!"

"No—no, I did not. Rafroche must have seen me hiding it, stole it from me, from us—"

"Yah, liar! Son of a dog!"

Guimerot lunged downward, hands flailing. A knee cap cracked his lips wide. An elbow gored his eyes. Weak, fluttering hands tried to choke him, tear his flesh. Laman—he was fighting!

Guimerot lurched up and back, laughing at first. Then serious, somber with wonder as the other followed him in, fought at him frenziedly. A strange thought suddenly entered Guimerot's mind, dominated it. He had been wrong—wrong. Here was no weakling, no gutless tool of any bully, but a man!

"Enough—enough!" he choked out, gripping at the other's hands to restrain him. "I am wrong and you are right, Laman! And, more, you are a real mug—a man!"

But Henri Louis Laman had toppled backward in unconsciousness.

They buried Rafroche, the prisoner who had tried to escape, then questioned the road gang man by man. They learned nothing. Guimerot still ruled them completely. Also, in the first place, they knew nothing, although they thought a lot, because Rafroche, half mad and

secretive, had tried a break without aid.

But it was months before things were forgotten in the barracks; before the *corvées* and guards stopped discussing it. Months of agony and soul torture for Laman and Guimerot, for, once more, they were plotting escape.

It was eight months from the day that Rafroche had made his attempt that Laman marched forth with his first strip of the new rope closely coiled about his ankle. It was almost a year more before the rope was done and ready, for other men had been given ideas by Rafroche's attempt, and secreted savagely every shred and bit of cloth and cord they came across.

At times it seemed to both men like a vague dream of their tossing sleep, for they had been at the thing nearly five years, and Laman's actual prison sentence was almost up, his ten year probationary term within the bleak confines of the prison settlement shortly to begin. But now he gave little thought to that—escape was burning in his mind. Escape, then France, to the old mother who still lived, then Poland and Warsaw with Guimerot's money, some safe little job as a clerk, an artisan's helper, anything clean—clean . . .

Then through the underground passages which Laman himself did not fully understand, came another code message for Guimerot. Again Guimerot's old gang had been decimated by a brawl with the police, two good mugs killed, three more captured; his presence was badly needed in France. The "admiral" had again come out to Cochin China and thus to Australia, was ready to try it once more.

A WEEK, then two, a month—another message, this time from the "admiral" himself, telling them to be ready a week from Saturday. In that week which intervened Guimerot outlined their plan. The guards were more watchful, more suspicious, since Rafroche's insane attempt. They must not have guards firing at them while they ran toward the wall—Guimerot was getting a little old and slow, still a bit lame from his second terrific battle with the long dead Arab.

No, they must put those guards out of the way before they began their race for the wall; and at noon Laman must lash about his body, beneath his jumper, their new rope. The signal? He, Guimerot, would give a signal, and Laman was then to do likewise to the remaining guard—and run, run, for it was he who must secure the rope, get to the top of the wall first and thus assist him over. That was all. The rest—Fate.

Saturday. While the last echoes of the morning drums still rumbled in the courtyards they marched forth, and Laman looked back at the grim white pile over his shoulder. Never again, he knew with some inner, mysterious knowledge, would he ever see the inside of that place.

It was the rainy season. Mosquitoes bit at their tough, wet skins, gnats and flies buzzed about them in dark swarms. Rain dripped from palms; a low mist lay in the marsh grass by the wall, all but obscuring it and the sea beyond. A perfect day—for them.

He had imagined it would go slowly. It frightened him a little with the swiftness of its coming. Before he quite knew it, tools on his right shoulder, rope wadded and wrapped about his lean, hard stomach, he was in ranks, and watching with twitching, hot eyes Guimerot ahead. From the bank, from under their protecting palm tree, the two guards got up, advanced to the middle of the road, one at the head of the column, near Guimerot, the other at the tail, close to him.

The senior guard, who led, bawled out—

"*Marche!*"

They marched, perhaps six paces. Then Guimerot pushed and tripped the man ahead of him, throwing him down, tripping up other men. The column slowed in confusion. Warily, the leading guard started back.

"Step out, Guimerot!" he yapped, bringing his cocked rifle to his hip.

"What in the devil's name is this!"

"Don't know," shrugged Guimerot, and half turned, to look back along the line. "One of them guys behind pushed me, that's all."

He turned back, and brought the pick from his shoulder in a swift arc that ended alongside the guard's head. The man fell silently, his skull crushed like an egg shell. The column cried out, stirred, as Guimerot dived back between the ranks, hiding for the moment.

From the rear the other guard rushed forward, cursing. Laman had no clear knowledge of it, but as the man passed him he dropped his pick, upraised his shovel, and slammed it down—just at the base of the brain. All he saw was that the man was down, and stayed down. Then he swung on his toes, veered around the tail of the column and was tearing off through the mists of the marsh, a pounding figure which was Guimerot at his heels.

Blood was sounding heavily in his ears when he reached the wall. Fumbling, he tore off his jumper, started to uncoil the rope. Twice its turns fouled, and he screamed in his agony of haste. Then it was all free, the hook in his hand. He jumped back a pace or so, threw up—up. It clattered down past him to the grass. He threw again, failed. Threw, and won.

He turned for just a moment; Guimerot, limping badly, was some twenty yards from him still, but coming steadily. That was as it should be. Hand over hand he started up the rope. And as he started the first bullet from a guard's carbine spattered against the concrete of the wall.

His hands found the glass set top, were cut to the bone. Heedless, he pulled himself up, rested there, waiting now for Guimerot. Bullets whistled over his head. He realized he must be a perfect target. He looked out to sea. A low dark shadow lay there—the "admiral's" launch—and, just nosing through the last breakers, a native outrigger canoe, three white, hard faced men at the paddles. It was here at last—escape! But Guimerot, he must hurry . . .

Guimerot was erect at the foot of the wall. Guimerot was reaching up for the rope. Then was flat on his face, a slow smirch of red widening on his shoulder. Again he started up, blue lips back from his teeth. He went perhaps five feet, could go no more—slipped. He dropped thuddingly to the ground, his bad leg crumpling beneath him.

Surprisingly, he felt no bitterness, no despair and terror—only a vast, cool calm. He looked up at the haggard man waiting for him above. Laman—that was his name. Laman—a good mug. Not a real crook like him, but a square guy. A mug who had been a weakling, a tool of the gangs, without guts, until that night that he, Guimerot, had beat him.

A real good mug, a kid who would go clean if—if— While he, huh! It was in his blood, crime; in his brain, murder . . . Soon, if he escaped, he would be back in a place like this, or lying on the sloping plank, head through the *lunette.* While, strangely, this kid had gained his manhood in this place, would now—

Another bullet hit him; this time through the calf of the leg. He looked up, wincing with pain; the white clad guards were thrashing through the marsh grass, firing at him, at the kid still crouching on the top of the wall. That wasn't right, no . . .

Guimerot got weakly to his feet, pointed at the down hanging end of the rope.

"Go on, kid!" he howled. "Go on! Pull the rope over. I'm licked! Go on, witless!"

Just for a moment, first in pleading, and then in thanks and farewell, Laman's eyes caught his eyes. Then Laman was gone—was safe. Contentedly, Guimerot dropped back to the marsh grass, lay as if dead, his blood hot and thick upon his sweaty skin.

The guards were about him, poking at him with their carbine muzzles. He made no movement of life, lay woodenly,

eyes shut, hands lax. Then, with the speed of long training, they began to make a pyramid of bodies, thus to surmount the wall and fire at Laman. Just as they brought it to its height and the top man was even with the line of the wall, Guimerot, *caïd* of *caïds*, rose up, butted in among them, gathering arms and legs, kicking faces, bodies . . .

In a solid pack they turned upon him, grabbing for their rifles. He howled and charged full into them, knowing that now they could never catch Laman. Half a dozen bullets hit him at once. He went down, rolled forward, caught at the grass with his unfeeling hands, some way got to his feet. For a mad second he leered at them gaping open mouthed at him, then a slow soft laugh came from his bloody lips.

Here, at last, was death. And here, only here, at last for him, was freedom—was escape . . . Head down, like a cracked idol, he fell.

What's In A Name?

By

ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

ON A blinding day of summer in 1855 two Frenchmen had a difference concerning the ownership of a claim along the Greenhorn River in what was just coming to be called the Mother Lode of California's goldfields. They settled their difference in a typically Gallic way with great outcry and a minimum of bloodshed. At the end of the fray, however, the loser was minus an eye where the victor's thumb had searched in a manner considered reprehensible by the one hundred per cent. American bystanders.

Forthwith the new camp, which was the scene of action and hitherto had remained unnamed because everybody was busy sluicing gold, was christened by the blunt Anglo-Saxon name of Gouge Eye. You will find that name on geodetic survey and forest service maps today, albeit of the town itself remains hardly a trace.

So by delightful haphazard and in a fine scatterdash fashion the red shirted roughnecks who swarmed over California's foothills from Death Valley to Trinity found names for their camps upon which Bret Harte and a score of lesser chroniclers of the days of gold built pretty reputations for delightful invention.

No invention about it. Every one of these blunt, sardonically humorous names of California's ghost mining towns represents some racy episode from the high tide of life which frothed about the foothills of the Sierras three-quarters of a century ago. Recently I made a swing around the circle of vanished mining camps in four Sierra counties, gleaning from ancient records and, occasionally, from some hermit survivor of the brave days, the sources of such fanciful nomenclature.

Take You Bet, for instance. You can worm your little car through its single main street today and hardly know you have come to the town. But Lazarus Beard, of Beardstown, Kentucky, was first settler there. He started a saloon in 1857.

When the camp started to mushroom, Beard, whose pride in the place was inordinate, wanted to find a snappy name. Two cronies from the nearby camp of Walloupa used to drop into Beard's saloon and, while the generous proprietor set up the drinks, they would suggest names. Beard had an argument against each contribution. Argument meant more free drinks. At last the moochers queered their game.

Beard's favorite ejaculation was "You bet!" One day the Walloupa bar-flies in a spirit of fun suggested "You Bet."

"You bet it'll be You Bet!" shouted Beard.

And so it was.

Town Talk lies midway between Grass Valley and Nevada City on the ridge separating the two neighbor towns. In the time when the gravel diggings behind Nevada City and the new quartz mines of Grass Valley each held its rival thousands, the saloons on this dividing ridge were places for gathering and swapping of gossip.

"If you want to hear the talk of the town go up on the Ridge," was the by-word of the day. So—Town Talk.

Down on the lower Yuba River, not far from Marysville, a new camp started between the low red foothills which in summer conserved the heat like the walls of a Dutch oven. One day in the early life of the diggings a green freighter from Marysville emerged from a cloud of red dust and, swabbing his dripping face, inquired of the nearest idler whether in the name of this and that he'd arrived at hell or just Timbuctoo.

With a wild halloo the idler summoned every man in earshot to come and partake of the freighter's hospitality. He'd named the camp—Timbuctoo! There she stands today—a raddle of tumble-down buildings with green iron shutters permanently closed over sightless eyes. Timbuctoo!

Bret Harte never visited Poker Flat before or after he wrote of the Outcasts from that camp in what is now Sierra County. It was so named because the four original discoverers of its rich rim-rock outcrops used to play poker to see which one would wash up the dishes. Loser washed.

Nigger Tent, where once the notorious Florida House housed its gang of cut-throats under the patronage of a Creole woman, drew its name from the fact a runaway slave first discovered the riches in a nearby creek. Fearing to be re-taken, for California was filled with Southern pro-slavery men at the time, the luckless negro buried himself in the higher fastness of the Sierras and left his claims to be invaded.

Bloody Run came grimly by its sobriquet. Five murders of men with fat gold pokes within a month and one miner cooked on his own stove because he would not tell where his cache was.

A Van Rensselaer of New York and his mother once lived in Brandy City, away up on the ridge above Yuba's north fork. The town was so named because in getting there a pack mule went over a cliff and crushed a keg of the precious nectar. Wherefore, a name given not in happy commemoration but in mourning.

And Shirt-Tail Gulch—well, anyway, it was a gentleman's shirt-tail and he lost it getting down into the gulch.

A Novelette of a Drill Fight in the Land of the Black Gold Gushers

STOPPING the car, old Pecos Stuart turned and flung out a long pointing arm.

"Well, boys, theah she is," he announced with vast pride. "The Lost Strip. Ten million bucks in black gold."

The man beside the old cowman twisted in his seat, started to open his mouth, cast a look of hostility at the third man in the back seat and closed his lips into a thin, hard line.

"I lifted this heah Strip right from undeh the crookedest major company in the oil game," chuckled Pecos Stuart, telling his story for the hundredth time. "Look at her, boys. Fo' hundred yards wide, fo' miles long and right smack dab on the top of the structure! Cream of the field! Look theah! And theah!"

Successively he pointed, first to the southeast, then to the northwest. Following his gnarled, pointing finger the impassive eyes of his two companions noted again the wide spaced forest of oil well

LOST GOLCONDA

By FOSTER-HARRIS

derricks coming up from the southeast, a straggling succession of blackened towers, the closest less than a mile away. To the northwest at about the same distance they could see one lone derrick, towering boldly on the top of a great rocky ridge; but behind the ridge, they knew, were more derricks, over the shallow producing wells in the Millrace pool.

"Wells on two sides and comin' right towards us," commented the old cowman shrewdly. "And both of you-all's geologists says this heah Strip is right on the top of the field. Whatta you say, boys?"

Again Buck Hitchcock opened his mouth, glanced at the other operator in the back seat and closed his lips without sound. Shrugging his heavy shoulders, Williams, the man in the back seat, struck a match, cupping the flame in his hands, applying it to the chewed cigar he held in his mouth, leisurely coaxing the tobacco into an even glow.

"You've heard my proposition, Pecos," he said briefly. "I'm ready to close the deal and give you immediate action."

Grunting, old Pecos Stuart heaved himself out of the car, revealing lanky, bowed legs ending in scuffed cowboy boots.

"Each of you boys is plumb mad at t'other one fo' buttin' in on this heah deal, ain't you?" he asked startlingly. "Yeah, I know. I done it a-purpose. Listen heah now—"

He paused, stooping to pluck at a blade of the sparse grass that grew here and there around the rocks and stunted brush, his faded blue eyes staring out over the tremendous West Texas landscape.

"You know my trouble," he said abruptly. "The Magnus Oil Co'poration, damn 'em! Tricked me into leasin' my ranch fo' next to nothin' and now they won't drill and I can't make 'em. Fawty-six thousand acres with mebbe two, three oil pools on it, all tied up till mebbe long afteh I'm dead and gone."

The faded blue eyes were bitter. But suddenly they smiled.

"The Magnus, the damn' crooks," said the old cowman with soft jubilation. "I'm gonna poke 'em wheah it shuah hurts. I done found this heah Lost Strip right in the middle of the Magnuses' best lease. I got it and you're gonna develop it fo' me. You're gonna make it wuth five, mebbe ten million dollahs."

Old Pecos Stuart was smiling like a boy.

"You know, I been a-livin' in this heah country a mighty long time," he went on with quiet pride. "I he'ped set out the mesquite, I did. And I was heah when they sold out this country in heah. Lawd, fo'ty yeahs ago!"

He was chuckling.

"This heah was what use' t' be the old Madison ranch—" waving a hand toward the vast expanse of rangeland to the south. "No'th from heah was the Jaybird ranch. When they surveyed them properties out from the i'on pipe markehs they was just about fo' hundred yards left oveh between 'em, see, but fo' hundred yards didn't mean nothin' then, so they just split the difference and forgot about it.

"Well, when they hit oil oveh theah in the Millrace pool two yeahs ago the Magnus people come in heah and leased all this up solid. Leastways they shuah thought they did. And when they hit oil down southeast theah, why the Magnus boys shuah figgered they was a-settin' purty with a solid lease oveh the entiah top of the structure."

With a joyous gurgle the old cowman beat upon his knee.

"They shuah did," he chortled. "But this heah ignerent old cowpoke, Pecos, the very same old yap the Magnus boys had done city slicked outa his leases, why he all to onct recollects how these heah two ranches didn't quite meet. So he gits him a surveyor, this old cowpoke does, and he surveys it all out and he gits him a lawyeh and he goes to Austin, and be golly if he don't git the lease on the vacancy strip between Block LC and Block 21, Cartwright County, Texas, fo' hundred varas* wide, eight thousand varas long. Fo' ten cents an acre, mind you, and it's wuth a thousand an acre easy! Lifted right from undeh the Magnus boys' noses! Gentlemen, hush!"

OVERCOME with laughter, Pecos Stuart bent double, cracking his horny palms against his knees. As suddenly he straightened, face solemn as an undertaker's, one gnarled finger wagging in his companions' faces.

"Heah's my proposition," he snapped. "I know you boys and I like you. But afteh what's happened to me I don't trust nobody in this heah oil game. I want action on this lease and I want it mighty damn' quick!

"Buck, your geologists says the place to drill is on the east end of this heah Strip, don't they? And Blackie, yours says the west end. Ain't that right?"

Both men nodded. Pecos shook a silencing hand.

"Well, suh, one of them rock hounds is prob'ly wrong," he declared impatiently. "They ain't oil cleah acrost this Strip. This heah field's runnin' like a shoestring, no'thwest, southeast. If I pick the wrong man, why I prob'ly git a dry hole and then plenty delay, ain't that right?"

"I'm willing to bet the money my geologists are right," spoke up Buck Hitchcock stubbornly. "If this, uh, posthole digger hadn't butted in on this deal I'd be getting ready to give you action right now."

With a hard laugh Blackie Williams took the cigar from his mouth.

"Listen, you water well driller," he said coldly. "You're not Stuart's guardian or anything. I was invited into this, see? My rock hound checked this lease with torsion balance and I'm going to drill the west end where the oil is, get me?"

"Wait a minute now, boys," commanded Pecos Stuart firmly. "I'm gonna make this a spo'tin' deal and give you both a chanct. Heah's my proposition—and it's final:

"Buck, I'll give you any drillin' site you pick on the east end. Blackie, you can have any drillin' site on the west end. The one that gits an oil well or the man that gits one fust, providin' you both do, gits the whole lease, minus only the other man's drillin' site. I won't charge a nickel fo' the lease. But the man that gits it has to drill it all out right away and I'll take two-eighths of the production. The State gits one-eighth royalty and you git five-eighths. That fair?"

Williams and Hitchcock looked dubiously at each other.

"Wheah's yo' spo'tin' blood?" asked Pecos, gently sardonic. "Two oil men skeered to take a chanct? You 'fraid of each otheh?"

"By gad, I'll take you!" snapped Hitchcock. "Do my soul good to take a lease from this guy here."

"Yeah," drawled Williams sarcastically. "You'll take it right away from me, you will—just like the Kaiser took Paris. I'll go you on that, Pecos."

"Well now, that's shuah fine," applauded Pecos Stuart, vastly pleased. "No hard feelin's now, boys. May the best man win—and me, anyways."

So they drew up the agreement in Cartwright, county seat and sole and only town in Cartwright County. Hardly a legal or yet a strictly business arrangement, but sporting, as old Pecos said. And what was the oil game if not a great game of chance?

Precisely five days later the first of the big trucks carrying materials and drilling machinery on to Blackie Williams' drill-

*Vara:—A Texas land measure coming down from the Spanish. A vara is equivalent to 33⅓ inches.

ing site, selected on the west end of the Lost Strip, in the center of a small flat, arrived on location. Williams had signed a contract for a big drilling rig and crew and was getting on the job.

An all steel derrick reared itself up a hundred and fourteen feet into the sky over the concrete foundations a half dozen Mexicans had placed under the ramrodding of a hard swearing rig builder. More trucks roared in, carrying tools, boilers, drilling engine, bull, calf and band wheels, crownblock, drilling line, bits, all the thousand and one things needed for a drilling oil well.

The drilling crew had come with the trucks. Four husky veterans of a dozen fields, two of them, Bill Francis and Society Moore, the drillers, the other two, Borger Higgins and Biscuits White, the tooldressers. A pipeline swung out to a windmill and tank the cowboys on the Madison ranch had dug years before, half a mile from the location. A water tank went up near the boiler, beside it a fuel oil tank. Some of the giant trucks began coming in with fuel oil from the Millrace pool. The drilling crew was at it hammer and tongs, rigging up.

"We'll spud before Sunday," Williams told Pecos Stuart with a grin. "Maybe day after tomorrow. Now where's your Buck Hitchcock—ain't even moved in yet, has he?"

Pecos Stuart grinned mildly, silently. It was quite true that young Mr. Hitchcock had as yet done nothing save drive a location stake on the drilling site he had chosen, some four miles away on the east end of the Strip, and then disappear. But as old Pecos remembered, there was a rabbit and a terrapin once that staged a derby . . .

The day the Williams No. 1 Stuart—Vacancy Strip—spudded, the first truckload of materials for the Hitchcock Oil Company's No. 1 Stuart—Vacancy Strip—arrived on location. Just a load of derrick timbers it was, followed the next day by more truckloads and a crew of rig builders who engaged forthwith in erecting an eighty-four foot wooden derrick, ponderous, clumsy and stubby in comparison with the towering, spidery, steel tower over the Williams test.

THE WILLIAMS NO. 1 spudded in. Half the citizenry of Cartwright were there, for the news of the queer race had spread far and wide.

No mean stake would these wells be racing for. It was gusher country—the Lost Strip in typical production might easily be worth millions of dollars. There was romance to it, high color and the glamor of rich black gold. They knew what oil meant, these Texans.

Blackie Williams made a little speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted cheerfully. "I reckon you already know all about the peculiar race in which this outfit is participating. It's getting the advantage of starting first. We're betting our cash money it comes in first. Further, we're expecting the greatest oil gusher ever drilled in Cartwright County! Let her go, Francis!"

Bill Francis' ready hands moved swiftly. With a ponderous snort from the engine, over went the great band wheel, the jerk line yanked at the drilling cable, up and down went the tools, the heavy bit striking the soft top soil with a mighty thud.

Thud, thud, thud; the splash of water being poured in; the snort of the engine and the crash of the strokes—the first well in the destined to be famous race for the Lost Strip had started down.

A free handed sporting people, prosperous with high cattle prices and the flood of money coming in from oil lease sales, oil royalty sales and actual royalty oil returns; in the midst of a growing oil development with its black bonanzas, its huge winnings, its color and action, faster and greater than any gold rush; the citizens of Cartwright County found this new race for fortune a thing of novel interest. True, they could not participate directly. But they could and would bet on any kind of race, horse race or drilling race, and bet they did. Before the crowd

had departed, somewhere between five and ten thousand dollars had been wagered on the Lost Strip race, with the Williams well, starting first, naturally an odds on favorite.

Nine days later Buck Hitchcock spudded in his test on the east end of the Lost Strip.

Moving in his own rig from a complete dry test, two hundred miles away, fighting desperately to gain time, gathering his forces, rigging up and getting ready, he had accomplished a remarkable feat even in starting that soon.

It was close to midnight when everything was in readiness, midnight of the ninth day after the Williams test had started down. The Williams test already had set surface casing, overcome a slight delay on a water sand at three hundred and ninety-seven feet and was smashing steadily down.

A cold dry wind was sweeping down from the north, whistling about the ridge-top on which the Hitchcock well had been located. Only the drilling crew, Hitchcock and old Pecos Stuart, were present; for as night had drawn on the other watchers had decided that nothing exciting would happen until morning and they might as well call it a day and go home.

The head driller, Rag Line Grant, turned a weary face to Buck Hitchcock and grinned in tired fashion.

"She's all set, I reckon, Buck," he said. "Wanta make hole?"

Hitchcock looked at his watch.

"Midnight," he said. "By the Eternal, boys, let's do spud her! Put a chunk under that pot of yours, Dainty, and let's go!"

Dainty Howard, Grant's tooldresser, swung wearily toward the boiler. They could hear him speak briefly to Dub Mills, the other tooldresser, who was still clanking away industriously over the engine and with a thud Curly MacIntosh, the other driller, dropped to the derrick floor from the girt where he had been stringing an electric light.

"You ain't gonna start now, are you?" asked Pecos Stuart diffidently. "Not wait till mawnin' and—"

"Hell, why wait?" snapped Hitchcock. "We're not much on ceremony. Yeah, we'll spud now."

Thirty minutes later the bit hit the dirt for the first time and the Lost Strip race became a real race.

In the first tower, the shift from midnight until noon of the next day, they made fifty feet of hole. They ran surface casing to a hundred and seventy feet in the same tower a day later. Meanwhile the Williams test had passed seven hundred and fifty feet and was carrying down ten-inch casing as it went.

"Boys," Buck Hitchcock told his crew, "you know what getting a well here means to me. We've got to make a well and make it first. I'm going to give you boys one-eighth of this well if you bring it in before Williams gets his."

RAG LINE GRANT and Dainty Howard, the crew on tower, looked at each other in surprise. A one-eighth interest in a big oil producer such as might be expected here would mean an income running possibly as high as a thousand dollars a day, which split four ways would be two hundred and fifty dollars a day apiece.

"You're damn' tootin' we'll beat that Williams outfit!" Rag Line Grant burst out. "For that much I'd drill into hell! Buck, barrin' bad luck, we'll have you into the twenty-nine hundred foot pay in thirty days or less."

A little spark in his eyes, Buck Hitchcock nodded. The average drilling time in this section for that depth, he knew, was about sixty days with cable tools. If the drilling crew cut off half of that they would be going some.

By night it was known throughout the county that Hitchcock had made the offer. Hearing the news, Blackie Williams immediately mustered his own crew.

"Listen here, you guys," he barked. "You've heard about this bird Hitchcock's offer to his crew. Well, one well on

this damn' Strip won't make or break me. There's room for fifty wells if I get it. You guys get me a good oil producer and get it first and I'll give you one-eighth of it, and what's more, I'll stand all the production costs for you. Now make hole! You got something to work for."

The crew shuffled its feet, grinned widely and proceeded to make hole. And up went public interest like a rocket when the county heard of the new bonus offer. There was meat to this race. Geology, drilling crews, machinery, luck—a score of factors to be considered. The betting began to grow in earnest.

Then, aroused at last, the Magnus company, indignant and vengeful over the deft lifting of its prize lease right from under its nose, swung into action and took a hand in the game.

Owning virtually all the producing acreage in the Star pool to the southeast of the Lost Strip, the Magnus had here a complete field organization ready at hand. The wires from the headquarters offices began suddenly to hum with curt orders. A whole fleet of giant trucks was diverted from other work and sent roaring toward the Lost Strip, piled high with materials and machinery. Rig builders, roustabouts, drillers, roughnecks, workers by the score were sent hurrying toward the scene of action.

From the derrick floor of the Hitchcock No. 1, Buck Hitchcock and old Pecos Stuart saw a young army descend upon a location just one hundred and fifty feet south of the south line of the Lost Strip, seven hundred and fifty feet from the Hitchcock test and as close to the dividing line as the law would allow. Scrapers and teams, tractors and trucks piled high with materials, beat a broad trail through the brush from the road. Simultaneously, seven hundred and fifty feet north of the Hitchcock test, a hundred and fifty feet north of the north line of the Strip, another small army was duplicating the performance of the first.

"Magnus outfits," Buck informed Pecos shortly. "Offsetting us—on both sides."

He glared down the slope of the sprawling ridge, peering angrily at the swarming workers.

"Well, by the Eternal!" he burst out in astonishment. "Rotaries! Pecos, the damn' Magnus is moving in rotary outfits!"

It was Greek to Pecos.

"Well, what of it?" he inquired mildly. "What difference's it make?"

"Oh, none I reckon," said Hitchcock. "Only a rotary drilling outfit can go to the twenty-nine hundred foot pay in maybe half as much time as we'll take with these cable tools."

"How come you didn't use them rotary tools then?" asked Pecos curiously. "And how come Williams didn't? And while I'm astin' questions thisaway, what difference's it make if the damn' Magnus does drill on both sides of us?"

"Well, I didn't use a rotary because this rig is all I got," explained Hitchcock shortly. "It's customary to wildcat with cable tools, you know. But, by the Eternal, if the Magnus is offsetting me on both sides with rotaries, then they got enough dope to know they can use 'em and they're certain there's oil under here, savvy? If they beat us to the pay they'll be pulling part of the oil from under the Lost Strip, old-timer."

"The hell they will!" snorted Pecos angrily. "Why, the damn' thieves! I'll betcha they're a-offsettin' Blackie thisaway too!"

HITCHCOCK laughed.

"Hell, Pecos, they got a right to offset the Strip if they want to," he said roughly. "Whatta we care? If we complete first we'll be pulling part of the cream out from under their leases, don't you forget that."

Pecos Stuart's mouth opened wide.

"Well, smack me right down!" he gasped. "This shuah is a spo'tin' race. I'm goin' oveh to see what they're a-doin' to Blackie."

At a fast hobble he went out of the derrick, heading toward his battered car.

Buck Hitchcock turned to Curly MacIntosh, the driller on the afternoon

tower, who sat with his hands on the temper screw, feeling the stroke of his tools as the walking beam alternately lifted and dropped the cable in crashing strokes.

"Looks summat like a race," suggested Mac quietly. "Offsets on both sides. Aye, looks ree-markable like a race, Buck."

"You said it," agreed Hitchcock, his eyes lighting. "By the Eternal, though, Mac, we can beat 'em! Let 'em use their rotaries. We're making hole now."

"Aye, we're making hole," nodded the Scotsman. "Doing right weel, I sh'd say. We're needing some more ten-inch casing in the next day or so though, Buck."

Hitchcock nodded slowly, the fighting flare dying in his eyes. All the large casing he had was on the location now and more, new or used, cost money. Financially he was far from flush, thanks to a series of tests which had promised highly at the outset but which had, one after another, finished dry, each costing its scores of thousands of dollars.

The Hitchcock Oil Company, although it sounded magnificent, in reality was nothing more than Buck Hitchcock himself. His few financial backers, cautious, penny pinching business men, had howled dolefully when the promising tests had proven dry. And while the race for the Lost Strip was undoubtedly a wonderful gamble, still a gamble is precisely what cautious business men try to avoid.

"I reckon I'll have to go to Fort Worth again, Mac," said Hitchcock curtly. "Keep her going while I'm gone."

Divining his thoughts, the Scot looked away and coughed embarrassedly.

"Ah—we ha' enough to eat on, the rest of the boys and me," he said awkwardly. " 'Tis no gr-r-eat help but ye need na worrit yourself about pay—and ye're welcome to what money we ha'."

"I know it, Mac," acknowledged Hitchcock gratefully. "Don't worry about that—I'll get the money all right. Well, so long."

MacIntosh nodded, his eyes on the throbbing cable, and Hitchcock went out to his car and rode thoughtfully away, down the rough trail to the highway where he turned toward Cartwright and opened the motor wide.

The road swung away from the Lost Strip, rounding an end of the high ridge which cut off the Hitchcock from the Williams test. Swinging around the ridge, Buck could see the top of Williams derrick in the distance, the black smoke from the stack over the boiler telling him that the well was working. The stunted brush and rolling terrain, however, made it impossible to tell whether the Magnus was starting any offset work against this test as they were doing against Hitchcock.

As he passed the place where the branch road turned off to the Williams test a big car swung into the highway just ahead of him and he saw that Blackie Williams himself was at the wheel, looking back and signaling him to halt.

"Well," snapped Williams as the two cars drew abreast. "I reckon you'll appreciate hearing that the Magnus is offsetting me."

Hitchcock looked at him with an enigmatic grin.

"They're offsetting me on both sides," he replied quietly. "Get that? Both sides! Put that in your pipe and smoke on it."

With a curt wave of his hand he drove on. Looking back, he saw the other operator still staring at him, a mixture of surprise and anger on his dark face, and then a turn in the road swept the scene from view.

In Cartwright, on the station platform, Hitchcock chanced upon an oil scout whom he knew, who told him that the Magnus had made four new locations, two against the Strip near Hitchcock, two similarly located against Williams. Three of the new wells already were starting and the fourth would be started at once.

"They're gonna beat you boys to the pay if they have to bust the company to do it," said the scout. "Their vice-president in charge of West Texas has just got back from a vacation and he's sure a-raisin' hell about them losin' the Strip thisaway. He's sure gonna drill it

out from under you if he can, Buck."

"Yeah?" drawled Hitchcock softly. "Well, maybe he will and maybe he won't. He'll get a race, guy."

The scout grinned.

THREE days later Buck Hitchcock was back, the lines about his mouth a little deeper, his face a bit grimmer and more tired. But he had got the money. The well was financed. And the needed casing already was on the way out.

He drove out to the well. Rag Line Grant and Dainty Howard were on tower and the big bit, they told him, was fighting a water sand, one of the troublesome, soft, "heaving" varieties, topped at one thousand and twenty-two feet.

"Boy, you're doing nice," Hitchcock applauded. "Pretty near caught up with the Williams gang, aren't you?"

"Within a hundred feet of bein' as deep as they are," affirmed Grant proudly. "Buck, you oughta been here. They been hung up on this here water sand for days. And we was goin' right through it with no casin'. Get the rest of that pipe out here and we'll be beatin' 'em!"

Hitchcock nodded, the fighting light shining in his eyes.

"It's coming out *pronto*," he informed the driller crisply. "Get her down a little farther and we'll switch to eight-inch tools and travel."

"We're gonna need to travel," put in Dainty Howard. "Look over there, Buck. The Magnus has got one well spudded, and damn' if the north one ain't ready to spud tomorrow. I never saw anything like it. And the south offset to Williams is pretty near ready and they're a-startin' work on the north offset. They gotta whole damn' army workin' on them wells."

Hitchcock turned and stared, first to the south, then to the north. On each side of the Lost Strip a gleaming new derrick had sprung skyward. The well to the south was drilling, spudding in, while the well to the north, Hitchcock could see, had rigging nearly completed.

"The south offset to Williams probably'll get started tomorrow," Howard informed him. "Boy, it's a race."

Hitchcock's jaw tightened.

"It's a race," he agreed with a little smile. "Boys, this well is going to be the first in if we have to drill thirty-six hours a day."

His crew grinned widely.

"Hell, Buck," said Dainty Howard genially, "I done bet them lousy drillers over on the Williams test two months pay we'd be the first well in."

Giant trucks were bringing the last of the ten-inch pipe from the Cartwright supply house. All through the day the big bits hammered savagely at the heaving sand, making a few feet of hole, losing part of it, making a little more, fighting constant cave-ins, going down.

At noon the next day when the towers changed they were out of the heaving sand into a hard blue shale. Hitchcock, Grant and Howard, who had stayed on the job with MacIntosh and Mills, had turned in on the bunks in the doghouse to catch some sorely needed sleep. Dub Mills was tempering a bit, MacIntosh was drilling. Came Pecos Stuart with the news.

"The Magnus No. 1-B Madison is a-spuddin'," he announced angrily. "And mo'n that, they tell me they're gonna start work on the no'th offset to Blackie too."

The Scot, by the headache post, grinned sleepily.

"Weel, what of it?" he asked calmly. "Did ye no expect them to start?"

"Hell!" barked Pecos. "You don't seem noways mad about them theah hellions. Lookit 'em. One well a-drillin' right spang up ag'in you-all heah, one right up ag'in Blackie a-startin' an' anotheh one right ag'in you-all gittin' ready. They're a-tryin' to steal all my oil, the damn' skunks. They— Wheah's Buck anyways?"

Buck Hitchcock could be found in the doghouse pounding his ear, MacIntosh informed him. With another snort of defiance at the Magnus offsets, Pecos went

in to wake the weary operator and relieve his feelings.

The next day the Williams test had set ten-inch casing to eleven hundred feet in a hard gray shale, had decreased the size of the hole to eight and a quarter inches and was driving on like mad. The first twelve hours after the change, so Pecos Stuart reported, Society Moore and Biscuits White had pushed the hole bottom on down eighty-five feet and the progress was continuing unchecked. The Magnus south offset to Williams was spudding. The south offset to Hitchcock was drilling. The north offset to Hitchcock was within a few hours at most of starting and materials were moving in for the Magnus north offset to Williams. And these wells, Hitchcock realized grimly, using the faster rotary equipment, would be able to make hole at a clip that would make his own cable tool rig look like a tortoise.

THE HITCHCOCK test was drilling at around eleven hundred feet in a series of sandy shales, broken by thin streaks of lime. At sunset they drove into a hard, blue gray shale. A vagrant oil scout drifted in with more news of the fast progress the Williams test was making. With sudden decision, Buck Hitchcock decided that the time had come for the last half dash.

"We'll run the ten-inch to this shale and change tools," he told MacIntosh and Mills quietly. "That Williams gang is pulling away too fast. We've got to make time."

So they changed to eight and a quarter inch tools—the fastest hole makers of all ordinary cable tool equipment—and settled to an interminable, dogged battle with the tough formation below.

Day after day, night after night, the drills pounded desperately on. There would come towers when the hole bottom seemed fairly to drop away and the lengthening log of the test would leap ahead with a bound, recording shales, sandstones, more shales and at length, steadily increasing forerunners of the limes and anhydrites. And in other towers, seemingly, they would make no progress at all, when the bit battled stubbornly with some extra troublesome stratum.

A fishing job held them up for a day when a bailer was lost in the hole. A half dozen flinty, boulder-like concretions, following the bit and refusing to be smashed or pushed aside, gave endless trouble.

But the Williams test too was having its difficulties—caving formations, a string of casing lost in the hole, a minor breakdown in the engine. And endlessly the clanking, grinding Magnus rotaries, four of them now, grinding ahead on both sides of both tests on the Lost Strip, crept nearer and nearer the pay.

Getting the breaks, the Hitchcock test began to draw abreast of the Williams well. Inch by inch, foot by foot, it closed the gap. And as they drove into the Millrace sand horizon at around twenty-five hundred feet there was hardly a foot's difference between the respective depths of the straining rigs.

The Hitchcock test hit the Millrace sand at two thousand five hundred and twenty feet. There was a whiff of gas, a bailer or two of oil, but when they drilled deeper, the hole immediately went into water.

"Go on," ordered Hitchcock curtly, biting his lips. "It's the big pay or nothing. Make hole, Grant!"

In Cartwright late that afternoon, where he had gone to send some wires to his backers telling of his disappointment, Hitchcock met Blackie Williams.

"Heard you hit the Millrace low and dry," greeted the black headed operator with a sneer. "Well, we're in it twenty feet high—and got a million feet of gas. How do you like that?"

"You haven't got a well in the Millrace, and you won't have," retorted Hitchcock harshly. "Cut the chin music, Williams."

Blackie Williams' lips parted in a snarl.

"You work your own jaw a hell of a lot," he said insultingly. "Damn' shame

you can't drill wells with that jaw of yours, you surly—!"

Buck Hitchcock's open palm cracked across the other man's jowl.

With a startled roar Williams smashed at Hitchcock's face with both huge fists. One glanced off Hitchcock's cheekbone, opening a spurting gash, the other missed; and laid wide open by his mad attack, the black headed operator had placed himself squarely in position for Hitchcock's instant counter.

In a powerhouse swing Hitchcock's left, coming from below with a surge, took the other man on the bottom of his protruding jaw. There was a crack, Williams' head jerked back as though he had been struck with a sledge, his feet left the ground and his big body crashed back and down, measuring his length in the dust.

Bellowing with fury, he bounded erect and charged in again. Both men were blooded now, both steel hard from the merciless work on the great tests, both with tempers strained and drawn to the fine edge at which anger is maniacal fury. Murderously angry, they crashed together like two maddened bulls, slugging, two fisted, toe to toe.

They clinched. With a wrestler's trick Blackie Williams snapped his great hands down on one of Hitchcock's wrists, turned, bent his back and jerked down on the arm with a savage heave, sending the lighter man flying over his head.

Catlike, Buck Hitchcock turned in the air, smashing to the ground on his hands and knees, throwing himself around and bounding to his feet to close again. With a barking roar Williams crouched to meet the rush—and between the two stepped a wizened little man in a great black Stetson, his hands on his belt, a cold commanding glitter in his faded gray eyes.

"Reckon that will be about all," said the little man calmly. "Cut it out now, boys."

The voice was low, soft, almost as a woman's.

"Yeah," he went on, "I think this has gone far enough. It ain't a good example fer the younger generation."

RECOGNIZING the little man as Dave Miller, sheriff of Cartwright County, Hitchcock obediently halted. Blackie Williams threw out one great arm to brush the little man aside as he might an insect. The little man made one lightning move, so fast the eye could not follow his hand and a long, worn Colt Frontier materialized instantly from nowhere, prodding its ugly muzzle into the big man's stomach.

"I said I reckoned that would be about all," drawled the old sheriff, distinctly spacing his words. "Come on."

Williams' face had paled slightly. He was no coward; but he was just remembering that this antique officer had the reputation of never drawing a gun without using it. And he certainly had pulled that gun in a hurry.

With a crackling laugh Hitchcock turned up the street in the direction of the weatherbeaten old courthouse.

"Come on, you big bluff," he flung at Williams. "You stand there any longer and Dave's liable to spank you."

For an instant Williams glared. Then, hanging his head, he turned and started meekly up the street.

About the petty justice of Cartwright County there was small delay. Two hours after their arrest, fat old "Twelve-fifty" Grierson, justice of the peace, had fined each of them his invariable twelve dollars and fifty cents, then had proceeded to read them a homely lecture.

"I'm plumb ashamed of you two boys," he observed cuttingly. "Fightin' this-away! Disgraceful! Can't you run this here race like gents, 'thout bustin' each other in the eye about it? G'wan now—shake hands and forget it."

The two operators looked at each other with impassive eyes.

"He called me a right hard name," said Hitchcock softly. "Maybe he wasn't meaning it?"

"The next time I see you, you better be loaded for bear," flared Williams. "You hear me."

Dave Miller, the old sheriff, took a hand.

"Buck, you pay up and git outa here," he commanded. "I'm gonna talk some with you, Williams."

By now a little amused, Buck Hitchcock silently obeyed orders. He did not see the black headed operator again during the hour or two he remained in town but just before he left a cowman acquaintance whom he chanced to meet passed on to him a bit of information, dropped by a scout, which no doubt explained Williams's touchiness.

The Williams test, the cowman reported the scout as saying, had indeed found about a million feet of gas, which as a well meant nothing in this area. But immediately beneath the gas had been water, drowning any chance for a producer in the Millrace.

A sardonic little incident, the fight, Hitchcock thought with a grin, as he drove back to his well. Both of them had gone into town bitterly disappointed over failure of their respective tests to make a well in the Millrace—both spoiling for a fight.

The Millrace was dry. That would mean five hundred feet, or maybe a little less, more to go. Not so far. But a five hundred feet located nearly a half mile down in the earth. Not so easy to make.

Anybody's race it was now. The two big wells were going into the last stretch neck and neck. And the Magnus offsets, not going as fast as they might, because of the uncertainty of their ground, but still creeping closer, foot by foot. Anybody's race now. Hitchcock was quite cheerful when he reached the well, joking with his crew when they asked curiously about the cuts and bruises on his face. Blackie Williams might outweigh him in a fight. But when it came to driving a well, making hole—well, that was different.

Old Pecos Stuart, who apparently had abandoned all his ranching business to trot constantly from one well to the other on his prized Lost Strip, drove in as usual early the next morning, eager to see Hitchcock.

"Hell!" he remarked in a slightly disappointed tone as he faced the oil man. "He didn't mark you neah as much as I figgered from what he says he done. He let on he ha'f kilt you and says he's a-gonna finish the job next time he sees you."

"Yeah?" Hitchcock smiled coldly. "Well, maybe he'll have a chance to try before long, Pecos."

The old cowman looked at him with a grave face.

"You gotta gun, Buck?" he asked in a significant tone. "Yeah? Well, pack it."

He turned abruptly and went over to joke with Dainty Howard, at the moment running the rig.

For a long minute Buck Hitchcock stood where the old cowman had left him, staring abstractedly down the slope to the south, to where the Magnus offset just now was running drill stem back into the hole to resume its steady driving on after the Lost Strip test.

So black tempered, resentful Blackie Williams would be gunning for him. And over such a trivial, damn' fool excuse. Shaking his head, Hitchcock swung slowly on his heel and went over to join Stuart and Howard.

MERCILESS, those last few hundred feet. The two tests neck and neck. The Magnus offsets, four of them, grinding down with their faster tools, closing remorselessly in. Slave driving, Hitchcock and Williams spurring their crews, the crews driving themselves, night and day, hour after hour, the rhythmic throb of the walking beams, the crash of the stroke, the slithering whine of the sandline sending the bailer down, and on both sides of the Lost Stripe the interminable clank and grumble of the rotaries, closing in.

In his trips to town Buck Hitchcock was carrying his old Army automatic snuggled against his leg. He did not seek Williams nor did he try to avoid him, but somehow they did not chance to meet and as old Pecos brought no more tales, it seemed possible that the black headed operator had decided to forget his foolish threatenings.

A day after his encounter with Williams, Hitchcock, returning to his test from a trip to town, found Dub Mills, MacIntosh's tooldresser, ruefully bathing a face that looked as though it might have been gone over with a hammer, while the Scotch driller, handling the temper screw, was dourly silent.

"That double damned, lousy Magnus gang down there," said Mills angrily. "Beat hell outa me, they did. Damn them to hell!"

"They did?" asked Hitchcock. "Why, what the—"

"Dinna ye understand? They ganged him, mon, the damned r-r-ruffians!" broke in MacIntosh. "They— Tell him, Dub."

"Well, they been a-pickin' on us ever since they started," explained Mills. "Ever' time we'd go to town or somewheres and meet some of that gang they'd start ridin' us and bein' nasty, see?

"Well, finally they got just too damn' raw and Dainty and me, we made two of 'em put up or shut up and they bet us two hundred that they'd complete a well first, see? But that didn't stop 'em from gettin' raw, and nachurally a guy can stand just so much of that kind of stuff. This morning I was in town and two of 'em started gettin' nasty again, see, and finally I busted a bottle over that damn' Jack Remington's head and he and Ben Passmore and another Magnus guy that run in, beat hell outa me."

"Well, what'd you expect, jumping on two at once?" asked Hitchcock dryly.

"Oh, I ain't complainin'," denied Mills hastily. "I done plenty damage too. And the judge, he fined them guys twelve-fifty apiece, see, and turned me loose."

"How many of these Magnus outfits are bothering you?" asked Buck shortly.

"Just that gang down there," said Mills, nodding toward the south offset. "Rest of 'em are nasty but they ain't startin' nothin'. That gang there is dirty."

Hitchcock nodded silently. There was nothing to say. He could not order his fiercely independent crew not to fight, especially when they were fighting more or less from pure loyalty. And he certainly could not make the Magnus crew refrain from hostilities. However, since it was the crew of only one well that seemed to be making itself offensive, from plentiful former experience Hitchcock judged that his own crew could very well take care of itself.

It did. Two more days elapsed. The well had made a hundred feet at speed, then had run into a maddening delay on some concretions, flint hard, unsmashable obstacles, the size of cannonballs, against which the bit pounded fruitlessly, finally pushing them to one side, starting to go on, only to have them drop back into the hole and again delay progress.

From a trip to town Hitchcock returned to find his entire crew on the derrick floor, eyes blackened, faces and fists battered and bruised, a sadly wrecked yet strangely cheerful outfit.

"We ha' ar-r-rgued wi' the Magnus boys," said MacIntosh, the r's rolling joyously. "We ha' that."

"Yeah?" Hitchcock's voice was dry. "And what did they use for arguments? Axes?"

Big Dainty Howard heaved his husky frame up from the lazy bench, turned a blackened, beaming eye on Hitchcock and waved a red knuckled fist in a magnificent gesture toward the Magnus south offset.

"You don't hear 'em doin' no celebratin', do you?" he asked. "No and you won't. Two of 'em come on the Strip and started yellin' things and we went down to argue with 'em, and two more come runnin' out and we sure done 'em wrong. Beat hell outa 'em and th'owed 'em off the Strip and double dog dared 'em to come back and they dassen't."

"They'd been a-worritin' us for some time," said Rag Line Grant, a bit shamefacedly. "I kinda figured it was time to put a stop to it."

Hitchcock grinned.

"Four to four and you threw 'em off, huh?" he demanded. "All right, I

reckon you get the cigars. I'll bring a box next trip from town."

"Ye might," hinted MacIntosh politely, "include some good chewin' wi' that awar-r-rd."

They drilled up the concretions, went into more gray shale, then into solid anhydrite, below which they found lime. At twenty-seven hundred and fifty feet they were going fine, far ahead of schedule. Then their luck changed and things took on a different complexion.

THEY found a caving sand that closed into the hole like a viscous liquid, in which the drill made about as much impression as though it were attempting to make hole through molasses. Below that was a tricky lime in which the bit slipped sidewise down a dipping crevice, making a crooked hole that required a day and a half to straighten.

A heartbreaking cave-in caught a string of tools a day later, the drilling line, worn brittle by the incessant pounding, snapped off short and there they were, a whole string of tools lost in the hole and a nasty fishing job.

Two more days they lost in cleaning up the hole and fishing fruitlessly for the lost tools. Then, desperate for time, Hitchcock ordered a whipstock run in and an attempt started to drill by the lost tools. Hour after hour—then, they were by, going on down.

The Williams test too was having its troubles. It was a hundred feet or more ahead of them when at twenty-eight hundred and eighty the casing it had been carrying down had frozen fast in a loose formation higher up and defied all efforts to jar it loose. And the Magnus offsets, with wonderful luck, all the time were driving on, closing in.

Nerve breaking, those last few hundred feet. Tempers rubbed raw, drillers snapping at their tooldressers, tooldressers snarling back. Buck Hitchcock had been losing weight steadily. Gray, dogged, unconquerable, he drove his test on, packing his gun with him now wherever he went, for Williams was talking again, so Pecos reported.

With superhuman effort the Williams crew tore the frozen casing loose, cleaned up the hole and were going on down again, now fifty feet or more behind the Hitchcock test.

At twenty-nine hundred and seventeen feet, almost exactly where the geologist had said it should be found, the Hitchcock test topped the big lime. Unmistakably, it was the lime. Just forty or fifty feet to go now.

"By the Eternal, we're gonna win!" shouted Hitchcock jubilantly, turning from examination of the cuttings brought up by the bailer. "We're in the lime, Mac. Right next door to the big pay. We're gonna win!"

"Aye," agreed MacIntosh with a grin. "Did ye no expect to? E'en when I ha' put up a bet on us?"

Carefully, steadily, they went on into the lime. On through the night, into the next day. And in mid-morning came old Pecos Stuart, bursting with news.

"Well," Buck Hitchcock greeted him. "We're in the big lime, Pecos. The next few feet tell the story."

Pecos Stuart's arms waved and his jaw dropped excitedly.

"Well, by doggy!" he managed. "This shuah is a spo'tin' finish. Buck, Williams is in the lime too. He's hit gas and they're a-runnin' casin' to cement and drill in!"

Buck Hitchcock's jaw closed grimly. So the Williams well had hit the big lime and already found the gas which probably indicated that the oil was just below—while his own well as yet had found not even a smell of gas. It was a blow. With a harsh smile he changed the subject, resolutely putting the showing of the rival well out of his mind. His own test was doing the best it could. Nothing he could do now would change the result. There was nothing to do but go on, fight it out to the finish.

An oil scout or two dropped in on their regular wanderings from well to well, extracted the news by casual conversation

and departed. By nightfall a score or more of people, gathering like bees to honey as the news spread, had come drifting in to park their cars back on the ridgetop, gather around the well, gossip and wait curiously.

At nine o'clock the feel of the cable was telling MacIntosh that the bit then in the hole was beginning to mud up from cuttings and it was time to bail again. Since passing through a thin water sand above the big lime, the well had been running with several hundred feet of fluid in the hole, which the casing had not yet been lowered to shut off.

Unhitching the cable from the beam, MacIntosh set the bull wheel grinding, coming out with the tools. As if by some premonition the bystanders moved silently up to the edge of the derrick floor, their faces standing out clearly in the glare from the electric lights, watching the cable racing out of the hole.

Just before the long string of tools appeared, with a start, Hitchcock stepped forward, glaring at the cable. The drill stem came rocketing up out of the hole, the bit swung free of the casing, halted evenly, swinging gently, just above the hole. There was a sudden, excited gasp from the crowding onlookers.

The whole string was black with oil, a dully glistening, dripping liquid, unmistakably different from the usual brownish or grayish mud.

"Oil!" said some one in a loud voice. "They've hit it!"

Hitchcock stepped forward, his hands trembling, and slid two fingers over the side of the bit, scraping off some of the black liquid. He held his smeared fingers before his face, smelling them, then tasting the stuff with the tip of his tongue.

"Oil," he said in a low tone. "Run the bailer."

They ran the bailer to the top of the column of fluid in the long hole. It came up streaming with brownish black oil. Again they ran it, again it came up with oil. But the third time it came about half oil and half water and a trip to the bottom of the hole brought up, with some cuttings, much the same result, water with a good deal of oil.

WITH cautious hands Dub Mills recovered some of the cuttings, bringing them over to Hitchcock with a wide grin. For a long time the oil man studied the tiny bits of rock, breaking them, smelling, tasting.

"We're either in or mighty damn' near the top of the pay," he said at last, striving to make his voice casual. "We've hit. We'll set and cement casing at once."

By mid-morning of the next day they were running six and five-eighths inch casing to set and cement it in the big lime. A casing crew—five husky giants—and a cementing crew had arrived in early morning to augment the efforts of the drilling crew, brought by Hitchcock's fervent wires. All through the night the big well had been bailing oil at intervals and the black fluid still was rising on the column of water in the hole.

They landed the casing into the big lime and cemented it tight to the rock with several tons of cement, so prepared that it would harden in just three or four days instead of the usual ten or twenty. And long before they were finished came Pecos Stuart with the news that the Williams well already had completed cementing its casing and would be ready to drill in nearly a day and a half ahead of them.

Three days to wait. Impossible to describe Hitchcock's feelings during the time. Imagine it. A well, almost certainly a big producer, on each end of the Lost Strip. A property almost proven worth millions. Forty thousand dollars sunk in a hole to win the Lost Strip, winning or losing a matter of the next few hours. God alone knowing what those hours would reveal.

Jumping the gun, Hitchcock set his crew bailing the morning of the second day to test the water tightness of the cementing. If water still was leaking into the casing the cementing might have to be

done all over again, with more delay. And at the same time, the Williams test, over a day ahead, with its cementing job proven tight, was drilling out its plugs, going into the pay.

The crowd was there. Hundreds of people, scores of cars, cowmen on horseback, oil scouts, operators, lease men, oil field workers, townspeople. The whole county had been following the race, almost hour by hour as the end drew near. The Lost Strip, practically proven from end to end, a prize worth millions, about to be won.

The crew on the Williams well was drilling slowly, carefully. A lot of water purposely had been left in the casing to keep any gas from coming too suddenly. A control casing head had been attached to the top of the casing, to close it in if necessary. They drilled, bailed, drilled. Finally they stopped drilling and began to bail steadily.

Bill Francis, the head driller, was watching the hole like a hawk. Borger Higgins and Biscuits White poised the emptied bailer for another trip down. With a quick shake of his head, Francis waved them aside.

There came a tiny whispering, a faint rumble as of a train, far off in a long tunnel. A little puff of bluish vapor trailed from the casing head. A geyser of muddy water shot five feet up from the mouth of the hole, dropped back and then with a swishing, gargantuan roar, the terrific bellow of illimitable forces unleashed, up, up, up she went in a thundering volcano of mud, water, rocks and sand that smashed high above the top of the derrick, fanning out to leeward in a gigantic plume of falling rain.

A mighty gasser. All but indescribable, the tremendous, earth shaking roar. A tortured tornado of gas, rocks, water and sand, screaming to freedom from the bowels of the earth; a three thousand foot cannon ceaselessly pouring out a gigantic explosion against the peaceful sky. And as the well cleaned itself, the gas—the shining blue of blued steel—could be seen flashing over halfway up the inside of the hundred and fourteen foot derrick, shaking the heavy steel lines and cables like dangling cords in a gale.

After a while they closed it in, shut off the awe inspiring roar, shouted into one another's deafened ears, their voices sounding strangely thin and weak. A big gasser. Forty or fifty million feet, certainly. But no oil right with it. They would have to go deeper, tap the oil that must certainly lie beneath. It would be an oil well that would win the Lost Strip, not a gasser.

FROM a ridgetop a mile away Buck Hitchcock and Rag Line Grant had watched the gasser come in, standing quietly side by side in the blustering wind, saying little.

"Gasser," grunted Grant when the last blue fumes had died away in the derrick far below them. "Wasn't sprayin' oil none. We're all right."

Hitchcock nodded. There might be oil beneath that gas, there might not be. At any rate it would have to go deeper, if it could. And Hitchcock's own well already had been showing oil.

He turned with a quiet smile.

"Let's go back," he said briefly. "We're sitting pretty, Rag Line."

There was nothing to be done until the cement had sufficiently hardened, which would be some time the next day. They had demonstrated that it was a workmanlike, watertight job. Leaving MacIntosh and Mills idly watching the well, Hitchcock took Grant with him and started to town. Dainty Howard had already gone after more tankage and there would be plenty of details to be attended to before the well drilled in and tested.

It was after ten o'clock when Hitchcock and his driller decided to go back to the well, midnight when they jolted wearily around the last ridge to where they could see the lights on the derrick, outlined against the black sky, far ahead.

They turned off the highway into the trail leading to the well, wound down through the sandy flat, on up the rough

track which twisted up the ridge to the location. As they approached the well they heard a wild shouting, clear and startling in the night, coming from inside the derrick.

Nerves jumping, Hitchcock shot the car on up the last few feet of road in a roaring, bumping rush. A man popped from the derrick, a pistol glinting in his hand, his face white, and came running toward them and they saw that it was Dub Mills.

"Buck! Buck!" he cried wildly. "Oh, damn them, damn them, they've killed Mac and jimmed the well!"

"What?" shouted Grant. "Who done it? Quick, Dub!"

"That damn' murderin' Williams gang, of course," sobbed Mills, crying with rage. "Come on, quick! I reckon Mac's dyin'!"

On the run they went into the derrick. Over by the lazy bench lay Curly MacIntosh, unconscious, his head covered with a bloody towel where Mills apparently had been attempting to give first aid. And the mouth of the well, invariably covered with a great combination wrench when the well was shut down, with the string of tools lowered to rest on and secure it, thus preventing anything from falling into the hole—the mouth of the well now gaped wide open and the long string of tools was gone from the drilling line which now dangled above the hole, its severed end plainly showing that the raiders had dropped the tools into the hole.

They knelt by the driller's side. The back of his head was a mass of bloody hair but he still was breathing faintly.

"What happened," demanded Buck quietly. "Talk, Mills."

"Well, a coupla hours after you-all left Mac here he says why don't I drive over to that store in the Millrace pool and get some chewin' tobacco, seein's we'd run out and Mac he fergits to ast you to bring some. Well, I done it and a truck had went through a bridge just this side of the field and one thing and another I don't git back till about thirty minutes ago, and Mac was layin' there just like that and I seen what had happened and went and got my gun and come in and done what I could for Mac, and then you come and that's about all."

"Any idea who done it?" asked Grant curtly.

"Them Williams guys, of course," snapped Mills furiously. "I told you! Who'n hell else would?"

"Yeah, that's who done it," decided Grant, in a low voice. "That lousy Williams gang."

His eyes swept the derrick, his great body trembling with rage.

"They've th'owed in a string of tools, slips, cutters, bolts—Lord knows what all," he said, almost crying. "They've ruint us, Buck. Everything but the boiler in the hole. We'll never git it all out. And us cemented on the pay."

Hitchcock had been bending silently over the unconscious driller, feeling his heart beats. Now he turned. The light from the glaring bulbs fell pitilessly across his face and with a sharply indrawn breath Grant stopped talking. If ever there was death in a human visage, it was written plainly on the gray face before the driller's eyes.

"He won't die," said Hitchcock quietly, in a chill voice. "You get him into town to a doc, quick, Grant. Mills, you stay here. Don't let anybody come near."

He straightened and began to walk with precise even steps out of the derrick.

"Where—where you goin'?" asked Grant in a low, awed tone.

At the edge of the derrick floor Buck Hitchcock turned.

"Me?" he said, his blue eyes flaming terribly. "I'm going to kill Blackie Williams."

His big automatic gleamed in his hand. Smiling coldly, he turned and went out of the derrick into the darkness, down the Lost Strip, on foot, toward the Williams well.

A deep, almost inaudible growl was rising from the tooldresser's throat.

"Cut that out, damn you!" shouted Grant, half hysterically. "You heard him! Help me git Mac into the car!"

STARLIT night. No moon, no clouds, a ghost of a night wind scraping through the brush, otherwise dead, eternal silence. And Buck Hitchcock striding on, down the Lost Strip, the million dollar Lost Golconda, with the big automatic swinging in his hand and murder in his heart. Going to kill Blackie Williams. To kill Williams.

Sand and rocks beneath his feet. The lights of the jammed well behind dropped beneath a ridge and he was in the great silence. Darkness, the pistol in his fingers and death in his eyes. Going to kill Williams. Tramp, tramp, tramp.

He had started in a furious, murderous rage, the rage so compelling that it freezes the mind into inhuman calm. As he walked the hot anger burned itself away, leaving only one cold, definite purpose. He was going to find Williams and shoot him down like a dog.

Three miles now. Now two and a half —now two.

He was striding through a flat midway on the Lost Strip. For some reason he raised his eyes. He saw the black sky ahead pale, saw a raging, bursting light leap up, up to the very zenith of the darkness like the flare of a tremendous, exploding shell, saw it drop back and then come pouring up again, till the whole west glowed with an angry, bloody glare.

Unholy joy in his heart, he strode on. Almost instantly he knew what had happened. The Williams well, the big gasser on the west end of the Lost Strip, had taken fire.

He climbed to the top of the same hill from which he and Grant had watched the gasser come in and below him he saw the burning well.

The well was open, roaring as it burned, the tremendous flow of gas thundering from the casing with so great a rush that the base of the flame was perhaps twenty or thirty feet up in the derrick. The whole upper half of the derrick was blossoming with a mighty flame that reached high above the uppermost part of the rig. And from the geyser of fire poured out a tide of screaming light, coloring the whole landscape, driving back the darkness high into the heavens, billow on billow of unearthly, burning light that could be seen for scores of miles.

Even as he watched, the stout steel derrick, not melting, but softening in the furious blast of fire, began to buckle under the huge weight of the crownblock with its hanging steel cables and strings of tools. Like slowly softening wax the derrick began to bend in and down, folding, buckling until the crownblock tore away and came crashing down in seething flames into the blazing wooden housing around the derrick floor.

Steadily he strode on, the wild light beating upon his face. Red gods were a-thirst tonight. Blackie Williams possibly had died in the well. But if not the big automatic would attend to him immediately.

The fire would mean that the Magnus tests would be the first to complete. It could be put out and the well completed but it would mean plenty of delay. Plenty of delay but still not enough to allow the Hitchcock test, cemented but with a hole full of dropped tools, to allow this test any chance to get back in the race. Hitchcock had lost, despite the fire. But Williams would not live to enjoy his illgained victory.

Figures of men were moving aimlessly in the brush behind the burning well, appearing and disappearing. Hitchcock moved toward them, turning his head despite himself from time to time to look at the terrible, magnificent spectacle of the burning gasser.

The dimly seen men on the other side of the burning well had disappeared. With grim eagerness Buck searched vainly for them, circling the well, questing back and forth until he was several hundred yards away. Panting, he paused for a few minutes' rest, staring at the well, hugging the pistol against his breast. Hell, he thought sardonically, probably would look just like this brush here, with its black shadows wavering, reeling in the

storming tides of bloody light from the gasser.

Musingly he stared. And from behind him came a hard laugh.

"Damn you!" sobbed a hoarse, exhausted voice. "Damn you, I reckon you've beat me!"

Like a flash Hitchcock whirled, automatic leveled and ready. Not ten feet away was the man he sought—Blackie Williams—his clothes burned to rags on his great frame, the ugly red of burns showing across his face, on his hands, everywhere that the tortured flesh appeared through the remnants of garment. He stood with his great hands hanging loosely at his sides and on his burned face was horrible, mirthless laughter.

"Hitchcock, you damn' crook, you're smart!" he croaked. "Cold deck me every way you can and then when I figure I got you beat anyway, you set my well on fire. How'd you do it?"

Buck Hitchcock was crouching, the big automatic pointing straight at Williams' breast, a terrible consuming anger flaring up anew in his brain.

"Williams," he said in a low, grating voice. "Williams, you ruined my well. I'm going to kill you."

The big figure of the other man swayed. A shadow sprang across them, the flamelight beat glaringly on the big man's burned face and Hitchcock saw that he was still laughing.

"You dirty little liar!" croaked Williams. "You know I've played square. You've crooked me all the way through. You set my well on fire. Now you wanta kill me. Well, you damn', crooked coward, go on and shoot if you've got the guts!"

HE STRAIGHTENED, throwing his arms wide, laughing. Buck Hitchcock jerked the automatic an inch forward, bewilderment in his brain.

"You—you had my driller slugged and the tools dropped into my well tonight," he charged.

"You're a liar," said the other man. "You set my well on fire. Go on, damn you, finish it. You've won."

Irresolutely Buck Hitchcock lowered the pistol, staring at his rival. You could hardly kill a man in cold blood when he acted like this. He shook his head, striving to clear the mists from his brain. The other operator looked at him, infinite scorn and weariness in his sunken eyes.

"Quit trying to work yourself up to it, you two-bit crook," he taunted. "If you've got the guts, shoot. I've not harmed you—and you know it, damn you. You haven't the guts to shoot."

The pistol was wavering in Hitchcock's hands.

"Williams," he asked in a harsh voice. "Williams, did you jim my well—or have it done? Answer me straight, by God, or—"

Blackie Williams threw back his head with a hint of the old arrogance.

"No, you fool," he answered with hard scorn. "I never raised a finger to harm your damn' well. Nor ordered it done."

"Before God?"

"Before God."

Hitchcock's eyes were boring into the other man's flame lighted face. Suddenly he dropped the pistol, his lips trembling.

"I—I believe you," he said chokingly. "I dunno why, but—hell, I believe you. And I never touched your damn well. either."

The black headed operator came suddenly toward him, swung him roughly around so that the furious tide of light fell upon his face. For a moment they stood so, staring into each other's eyes. Then the black headed man dropped his hands, slumped down into an exhausted heap in the sand and began to laugh—short, jarring laughter that was nearer sobbing.

"I know it, Buck, I know it," he choked. "A coupla damn' fools, you and me—fools. Let an old fool cowman and a lotta saps sic us on each other like two dogs—and alla time . . ."

He twisted grotesquely about to fling out one great arm toward the Magnus south offset behind them, the gleaming

lights on its derrick not two hundred yards away.

"Magnus!" he said bitterly. "Magnus!"

Hitchcock was on his knees beside him.

"Magnus?" he asked. "You—you mean—"

Williams was still laughing.

"I can see it, now," he went on. "Old Pecos, egging me on—egging you on, everybody else ribbing us likewise, till we was ready to kill each other. And that damn' Magnus gang, sayin' nothing much, betting on themselves plenty, ribbin' us on—yeah!"

"Old Pecos wasn't trying to do us any harm," denied Hitchcock quickly.

"I know he wasn't," admitted Williams. "All poor old Pecos Stuart was wanting was quick action. He was trying to get it best he knew how. And now the Magnus he was trying to beat has licked him—licked us too. It'll be weeks before you or I can complete a well now. And those damn' Magnus wells are right on the pay—ready to start pulling the flush out from under the Strip now!"

"Magnus—you think the company did it?" asked Hitchcock.

"The company? Naw—leastways if they did you'll never prove it. The crews on these offsets—they're the boys that socked us, Buck. I had trouble with 'em. You had trouble. They'd been promised a bonus if they completed ahead of us. They all bet on themselves."

Hitchcock was staring at the burning well. He nodded.

"Sounds reasonable," he admitted. "We'll never prove it, though. How'd they set your well on fire."

"Don't know," said Williams wearily. "Maybe they didn't set it. Damn' thing just flashed on us while we was doing absolutely nothing—and there it is. What happened to you?"

"Somebody hit my driller in the back of the head and cut the tools loose and threw everything but the boiler in the hole," explained Hitchcock. "He'll probably never know what hit him, Mac won't."

They stared silently at the pillar of roaring fire, then Hitchcock turned.

"Blackie," he said, "we always used to fight like hell in my family. Always fighting among ourselves—until somebody else pitched in. Then we all ganged up and beat the sap outa whoever it was." He paused.

"Yeah?" grunted Williams listlessly. "Well?"

Hitchcock's blue eyes snapped.

"By the Eternal, you and me can fight it out to see who gets this Strip after we're through licking this Magnus gang!" he cried. "Listen here! I can put that fire out! You help me and I'll help you and —well, dammit, we can fight each other afterwards."

Williams looked at him for a long minute. His tired, burned face wrinkled in a slow, painful grin.

"You're talking sense," he approved, extending a hand. "Shake. I'll go you."

With a slow struggle he stood erect, wavering from weariness.

"It's almost morning, Buck," he said hoarsely. "I'm all in. But I gotta driller around here somewheres that's a whiz at fishing jobs. If you wanta get started I'll lend him to you now."

Buck Hitchcock was beside him. His blue eyes glowed, then whimsically, from his lips came the old, fighting phrase of the seekers for oil in far places.

"Come on, Blackie," he said. "We ain't never licked till we're dead."

BY AFTERNOON of the next day they were in the midst of their dual battle, fighting now with their backs to the wall, for one of the Magnus wells—the south offset to Hitchcock—had reached the sand and was preparing for a test before running casing and completing; while the south offset to Williams was at such a depth that it certainly had not more than thirty or forty feet more to go.

Buck Hitchcock had visited MacIntosh in the little Cartwright hospital. The Scotsman was conscious, although the doctors had him in bed and would keep

him there if possible for several days to come, fearing complications from the murderous blow on the back of his head. He had no idea who had hit him but some one had told him what had happened and he was exceedingly angry about the whole affair.

Buck laughed at him, made light of the damage, promised to come in again next day, drove out to his well. Rag Line Grant and Bill Francis, the driller lent by Williams, were on the job, optimistic that there might yet be a chance to clear the hole in fast order.

They were working now to get some idea of just how the lost tools lay in the hole and they were not hurrying. Fishing in three thousand foot holes is one job where haste is made slowly. No one could tell how long it would take to clean up the shaft. It might, with extraordinary luck, be a matter of hours. Or it might be weeks, even months—they might never get everything out.

Later Hitchcock went over to the Williams well, where the great column of flame still roared high into the air. Many men were working. They had brought in more boilers, retrieved the rig's own boiler, which had been moved back when the gas appeared, were setting them up, rigging fuel lines, steam lines, water lines, pumps. Eyes sunken deep in their sockets, face bandaged, looking ten years older, Blackie Williams was directing the work, preparing grimly for battle.

"I can't get a shooter for ten days," he told Hitchcock in a harsh, emotionless voice. "I can get dynamite or solidified nitro-glycerin in town, that's all."

Hitchcock nodded.

"That'll do," he said. "Get as much of that metal away from the hole as you can, Blackie, and I'll put it out for you. I've seen it done plenty times."

Slow, heartbreaking, agonizing work. So many things to be done. Bringing in boilers, water lines, fire hose, explosives, gathering men, making ready. And meantime the Hitchcock test fishing. Fruitlessly, endlessly fishing, groping in the hole with strange tools at the end of a three thousand foot line, trying to catch and withdraw the lost "fish" in the bottom.

Old Pecos Stuart had come out about noon. Confident of victory, he had celebrated a bit too thoroughly the night before, had overslept as a result and the news of the double catastrophe had been delayed for hours, making it all the more crushing when at last somebody told him.

"My Gawd, boys!" he cried. "Cain't nothin' be done? Them damn' Magnus wells is a-completin', I tell you. They're a-finishin'. Gonna pull oil out from undeh my Strip. Cain't you do nothin'?"

Blackie Willams took pity on him.

"A few days won't make much difference, Pecos," he said kindly. "What if they do complete first? One or the other of us will have a well on the Strip for you in the next few days, sure—and the oil they pull out for the few days before we start getting it, if they do finish ahead of us, won't mean anything particularly."

Pecos refused to see it that way.

"It'll be part o' my oil, won't it?" he demanded stubbornly. "I wanta beat 'em, damn' 'em! I wanta git these heah wells in fust even if it is o'ny ten minutes fust. Don't give 'em nothin', damn' 'em!"

Blackie Williams' jaw tightened.

"By golly, so do I," he snapped. "I wanta beat 'em. I'll do my damnedest."

It did not look as if the Lost Strip wells had much chance to beat the Magnus, however. The south offset to Hitchcock was actually in the sand. It made a drill stem test, proved beyond doubt that the oil was there. Remained now nothing more but to set and cement casing, wait until the cement had hardened, then drill in and the south offset would be the first completion. A matter of perhaps a day or so to run in the pipe, three days to wait for the cement to set, perhaps a day or two to drill in and complete.

The south offset to Williams found the pay. It too prepared for a drill stem test. And Hitchcock's crew still was fishing while the Williams gasser still blazed.

Two days since the double catastrophe.

The Magnus south offset to Hitchcock setting casing. The south offset to Williams completing a successful drill stem test. The north offsets nearing the pay. The Hitchcock test still fishing. The Williams gasser was prepared for battle.

BUCK HITCHCOCK had taken command. Husky giants and lumbering tractors, working at the end of long steel cables ending in grappling hooks, had dragged from around the huge blaze as much of the rig irons as they could, the intense heat forcing them to work awkwardly from scores of yards away. Under Hitchcock's quiet orders they now erected great shields faced with iron, backed with stout timbers, and began to shove them toward the fire, closing in inch by inch behind their protection, dragging with them steam and water lines.

They drew close enough so that the great streams of water, the shooting jets of live steam, could be directed against the base of the flame. Tons of water poured on the hot twisted metal around the roaring geyser of fire; tremendous, boiling clouds of steam closed it in. And triumphant above it all, hour after hour, the mighty pillar of fire continued to leap upward, a hundred feet or more into the air.

But Hitchcock had expected as much. He had doubted from the first that steam and water alone would extinguish the mighty blaze and from the first he had been directing preparations to shoot.

The great streams of water were set so that they would continue to pour upon and cool the steaming, hissing rig irons, eliminating as far as possible the chance of hot iron again igniting the well once it was out. A little cart, a two wheeled affair, packed with solidified nitroglycerine, spiked with sticks of dynamite, a deadly instrument of destruction, had been prepared and attached to a long steel line which with much difficulty had been laid so that it passed almost against the base of the roaring column of gas. From the rear of the cart trailed electric wiring, laid to the firing point behind the nearest shield, where Buck Hitchcock crouched.

Everything was in readiness at last. Hitchcock waved his arm. A dozen husky men, far on the other side of the flaming well, sweat streaming from their faces in the furious heat, laid hands on the line and began to walk away with it, drawing the cart into the well.

Jolting, stopping, starting again, teetering, it crawled right up against the base of the flame. Watching through a peep hole, peering low through the boiling smoke and steam, Buck Hitchcock saw it poise on the wreckage around the top of the casing, turned and shoved down heavily on the plungers of the battery.

There was a tremendous explosion. Débris from the blast—chunks of metal, pieces of the cart—smashed against the shield behind which Hitchcock crouched. The hundred-foot flame flickered like the flame of a candle in a sudden draft. Smoke, dust and steam churned high in a roaring chaos for a moment, obscuring the well, and the ring of watchers a hundred yards back saw the mighty fire leap up in one gigantic tower of flame, drop back into the smoke and steam and vanish. Then came the clear, triumphant roaring of the open gasser.

Blackie Williams and old Pecos Stuart, a hundred yards back in the brush, were dancing a wild fandango of joy. The watchers were shouting, the weary workers standing with mouths opened wide in excited, jubilant laughter.

Buck Hitchcock came walking wearily from behind the great smoking shield, head down, his gait that of a tired, old man. Williams and Stuart met him halfway.

"I reckon that wins the Strip for you," said Hitchcock simply. "Won't take long to clean up this mess and finish a well here. It's beginning to spray oil—reckon you've noticed that. And my well is jammed for keeps, I guess."

Pecos Stuart looked at Williams quizzically, opened his mouth, closed it again without a sound. The black headed operator's tired eyes were gleaming

fiercely, fixed on the well, his great hands clenching and unclenching.

"You done it for me, Buck," he said tensely. "You put her out. I ain't forgetting."

His hands fell in rough affection on the other operator's shoulders and then he was gone, striding away toward a group of his men. As he reached them, with an arrogant gesture he turned and thumbed his nose at the Magnus south offset, towering behind them.

Buck Hitchcock looked at Pecos Stuart, a twisted little smile on his face. The old cowman returned the look and one of his gaunt, calloused hands slid gently out to touch the oil man's sleeve.

"That was spo'tin', Buck," said Pecos Stuart softly. "Clean strain, boy! You showed clean."

STRAIGHTENING his shoulders, Buck Hitchcock looked at him, laughed gamely and turned away. He had lost the Strip. Quixotic, sure. Blackie could have found somebody else who knew how to put that well out but it would have meant days of delay. It did not matter particularly now anyway, since Hitchcock's own well apparently was hopelessly jammed. You played the game and if you lost, why it was best to lose like a man.

Unnoticed he slipped away, over to his car and drove off, heading toward his own well where his crew and Bill Francis, the driller Williams had lent him, still were hammering away at the all but hopeless attempt to clear the well.

There was nothing more Hitchcock could do now. Bill Francis had a wide reputation for being a wizard at cleaning up bad fishing jobs, and Rag Line Grant was no amateur in the work himself. Hitchcock could find none better than these two. If they failed, why that was all there was to it. All that could be done then would be to drill a new well.

He drove on to his well. The Magnus south offset was silent now, casing landed and cemented. Two days more and it would be drilling in. Well, Hitchcock's crew would be losing that bet.

Bill Francis met him as he climbed out of his car.

"No progress," said Francis wearily, answering the unspoken question. "We gotta few things out. But them guys throwed in everything that'd go down, seems like, and that casing's so damn' small we can't get nothing to take hold."

Dispiritedly Hitchcock went on into the derrick, watched them working hour after hour, getting nowhere, still never giving up.

Infinitely patient, dogged fighters, these oil workers. Though they were getting nowhere there was something inspiring about their indomitable persistence.

Finally, after sunset Hitchcock left them still trying and drove on back to town. It was all on the laps of the gods now, up to old Daddy Luck. But he still had some chance—and somehow he felt vaguely that the break was impending.

A late meal and he wandered over to the hospital to see how MacIntosh was getting along. Vastly perturbed and ruffled, the angular head nurse met him at the door with the news that the Scot was gone.

"We barely turned our backs," she proclaimed indignantly. "His nurse hadn't been out of his room five minutes and Mr. MacIntosh had gotten up and gone! In his nightshirt! Imagine, Mr. Hitchcock, in his nightshirt only!"

Despite himself, Hitchcock laughed. He had divined instantly what had happened, where MacIntosh would be. The Scotch driller had meditated long enough on that fishing job and his wager with the Magnus crew about finishing first. He would be out at the well, fishing those tools out. And there would be no bringing him back.

Hitchcock said as much to the head nurse, gained a sniff and a reluctant admission that the Scot's unceremonious recovery probably would not hurt him much anyway, and took his leave. He should go out to the well again and see about the recalcitrant Scot, Hitchcock told himself,

but too thoroughly weary and dispirited to care much now, instead he went to his room at the little hotel and dropped into bed.

He had a bad night, tossing and twisting. Finally, after the interminable hours of darkness, he arose wearily in the gray streaks of dawn, felt better after downing two cups of coffee and a warm breakfast and started out to his well.

A vague premonition hung over him as he drove, an intuitive feeling that something had happened, whether good or bad he could not tell. He rounded the ridge from where he could see his well, noted wonderingly that all work had stopped, stepped on the gas and went hurrying up the rough winding trail to the parking place behind the derrick.

Rag Line Grant and Dainty Howard, who had come on at midnight on the morning tower as usual, were sitting on a bench against the side of the derrick, obviously waiting for him. Squatting beside them was MacIntosh, head swathed in a now much soiled bandage, his hospital night shirt exchanged somewhere for stained khakis and boots. They watched him drive up, their faces curiously grave and casual and, unmoving, they waited until he had come swiftly over to them, bursting with questions.

With maddening deliberation MacIntosh extracted a crumpled sack of scrap tobacco from a pocket, wadded up a generous chew, thrust it into his mouth.

"Weel," he said with superb nonchalance. "We were just waiting for-r-r ye, Buck. We ha' everything oot. Do we drill in noo?"

"What!" exploded Hitchcock unbelievingly. "The hole clear! Say!"

It was too much for Rag Line Grant.

"This fool Scotchman," he said with a wide grin, "this cockeyed Scotch burrhead here, he come a-wallopin' out here just before Francis and Mills left at midnight and says he is gonna show us yaps how to get fish outa a well, and damn' if he don't do that thing. Has us do things you never heard tell of before and catch stuff, by golly; and finally he has us run a rope spear, yes suh, nothin' else but, and get it down on all that mess and jar hell outa it and by golly if it don't slip through and get itself caught in the drillin' line and bring the whole damn' mess up!"

"And we damn' near had pal-peetations when she sticks two, three times comin' up and we has to jar on that spear and it hangin' by a thread, so t'speak," contributed Howard.

"And it didn't hurt the casin' none that I can tell and she's clean clear to bottom," added Grant. "We're ready to drill out the plug right now if you say so."

HITCHCOCK was beyond words. He looked at the Scotch driller helplessly, his mouth open; then involuntarily his gaze shifted, first to the Magnus south offset, silent, down on the level at the base of the ridge, then back to the Scot again.

"Ye're wrong," said the Scot instantly.

" 'Twas no the bet, mon. 'Twas the pr-r-restige. We had to beat the crooked scoundr-r-rels."

"Prestige, hell!" jeered Dainty Howard. "Scotch luck. Whoever heard of a Scotchman losing a bet?"

"Weel," said MacIntosh, with fine condescension, " 'tis no good business."

Hitchcock was coming back to earth. The fishing job was cleaned up. The hole was clear—ready to drill in. The lucky break had come.

"By the Eternal, we'll drill her in now!" he cried. "Put a chunk under that pot of yours, Dainty. You sure you're feeling all right, Mac? We'll start drilling her in now."

Triumphantly they started work. Dainty Howard turned to his fires under the boiler; together, Hitchcock, Grant and MacIntosh set to work to make up a string of tools, begin the procedure of drilling out the plugs, going on into the sand below.

It was a delicate job. The drilling must go almost inch by inch on into the sand. Too deep might bring in possible salt or

sulphur water below the oil and ruin, or at least damage the well.

A casual visitor or two dropped by. The news spread magically and by mid-afternoon, when the well stopped drilling and began to bail, perhaps three hundred people were watching, their cars parked everywhere. A Lost Strip well was drilling in. A well winning the Lost Golconda, capturing a million dollar prize.

Oil was rising rapidly on top of the column of fluid in the hole. Beyond doubt it now was a well. Nobody could say how big but it looked like a big one. The tension among the watchers was electric.

Bill Francis and Dub Mills had come back at noon and the whole crew was now at the well. The spectators had been moved back to prevent accident. The bailer was running steadily, disgorging rich, brown black oil.

Rag Line Grant, handling the rig, waved the bailer back from the hole, took two steps toward the casing mouth, cocked a listening ear downward, whirled with a flashing grin.

"Here she comes, boys!" he shouted. "If you don't crave a bath git to hell outa here!"

The heavy casing was vibrating. They could hear a rising, rushing whisper, like rain coming over dry fields at the end of a hot, dusty day.

With a smash and a roar up she came, out of the casing, up—up and over the top of the derrick, in a grand, rocketing geyser of water, sand and black oil. High above the top the deluge broke, fanning out to leeward in a mighty plume, edged with spray. A torrential rain of oil beat down over the derrick, the slush-pit, the nearby ground. She was blowing in, a gusher—and a big one.

Drenched, streaming, all but drowned in oil, Buck Hitchcock was pounding Dainty Howard ecstatically on the back, just outside the derrick on the windward side. Abruptly he ceased belaboring the equally jubilant tooldresser, turned and dug at his eyes with dripping hands, striving to wipe the oil away and again feast his gaze on the gusher.

The big figure of the tooldresser, grotesque in its covering of black, streaming oil, bent toward him and raised a drenched hand to an equally oil covered mouth.

"It kinda looks like," shouted Dainty Howard in Hitchcock's ear, "it kinda looks like we might have a well."

After awhile, when the first force of the gusher had slackened and the well had cleaned itself to some extent, they went back into the black downpour, wearing sou'westers and oilskin suits like fishermen, closed it in with much exertion and came out looking more like tarbabies beginning to melt freely than anything else.

It was a big well, everybody admitted. Five thousand barrels or more, although, of course, an accurate check would have to wait until the well actually was flowing into storage or a pipeline and a gage could be made.

It was twilight. Hitchcock had returned a little way back up the ridge, out of the oil soaked area, to lie exhausted against a slanting rock, completely satisfied and entirely happy just to look at the blackened derrick. Two smeared, oily apparitions came plodding up the ridge from where they had cautiously parked their car, two hundred yards away, and with difficulty Hitchcock recognized the larger as Blackie Williams, the smaller as Pecos Stuart.

"I shore missed it," Pecos was mourning. "I oughta been bawn twins, dang it! I see you gotta oil well, too."

"Too?" Buck Hitchcock sat erect, stared inquiringly at the two newcomers.

"This ain't motor oil we took a bath in," grinned the larger figure, showing disconcertingly white teeth in an exceedingly dirty face. "I got an oil well too, Buck."

TIRED bewilderment was in Buck Hitchcock's brain. Williams had an oil well too. But how? He could hardly have even cleaned up the wreckage around his hole as yet, to say nothing of having his new derrick up, his well rigged and drilled on down to the oil pay. But Williams was

saying he had a well. And if he had, why, perhaps, he had won the Strip after all.

Hitchcock shook his head slowly.

"How come?" he demanded, his voice hoarse. "You can't have rigged up and drilled deeper this soon, Williams?"

"Didn't," grinned Williams. "Ain't even got my derrick finished yet. We closed that well in and today noon when we opened her she made a head of twenty barrels and she's been making a head or so every hour we've opened her since. Put two hundred barrels into the tanks since noon."

Hitchcock was very tired. He was not thinking clearly now, but Williams' words, undoubtedly true as Pecos Stuart was nodding corroboration to each sentence, were sending sick waves of disappointment through him. Blackie Williams had got an oil well first then and had won the Lost Strip—the Strip worth millions now, with a producer on each end. Stuart would accept the gasser heading oil as an oil well. Which meant that, despite his luck, he had lost.

The eyes of the other operator were fixed on Hitchcock's face, seemingly reading his thoughts. Abruptly the big man turned to his companion, nodding, and as if by some previous agreement, old Pecos Stuart grinned sagely, winked at Hitchcock with vast solemnity, tugged at his oil covered mustache and went strolling placidly on over to the blackened derrick.

"Listen here, Buck," said Williams, dropping to the ground at Hitchcock's side. "You got an oil well here and I got a well making oil. It's not going to do us a damn' bit of good fussing over who got a well first. You know as well as I do that this Strip has got to be drilled up now, and drilled up fast. The Magnus is goin' to slam in offsets just as fast as it can put them down and there's got to be thirty or forty wells drilled on the Strip pronto to hold the oil. Ain't that right?"

Hitchcock nodded. Williams, Hitchcock was convinced, had won. Yet here he was talking—well, queerly.

Over by the well old Pecos Stuart turned in the dusk, saw that the two were arguing vehemently, sat himself down on a rig timber coated thick with oil, sniffed a pleased sniff at the oil still covering his fingers, and settled down to wait patiently.

It was all but dark when at last the two figures came stalking out of the shadows, the bigger bulk of Blackie Williams leading the way, the slighter form of Buck Hitchcock at his heels.

"Well, Buck and me gotta proposition to make to you," announced Williams in a satisfied tone. "The darn' yap wanted to claim I won this Strip but I argued with him and showed him how neither one of us was big enough to handle this Strip alone, and how what you really want is action and not just us fighting each other. Ain't that right, Pecos?"

"I reckon that's right," admitted Pecos Stuart serenely.

"Well then, I'll tell you," went on Williams, winking at the old cowman. "Buck and me, we've decided that if it's all right with you we'll call this race a draw and go partners on this Lost Strip, and both of us pitch in and drill it up before the damn' Magnus pulls all the oil out from under. There's enough for both of us. That all right with you?"

"I'm plumb su'prised," observed old Pecos Stuart smilingly. "I had no idee you boys would wanta go partnehs. Yeah, that's plumb all right with me if it suits you-all—and all I asts is that you beat the Magnus on these heah otheh wells good's you done on these two."

"We'll do our damnedest," promised Hitchcock fervently.

"Think this proposition is all right?" asked Williams. "Think it treats us all fair?"

"Why," said Pecos Stuart placidly, "I think it's downright spo'tin'."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

"Kill 'Em And Leave 'Em Lay"!

SOME of the troubles consequent to fur farming in Florida, are described by Comrade Rogers in the following letter.

I note with interest the question on raising 'coon in Florida. I used to trap them in that State, and in the days before the trapping laws I usually had a pet 'coon or two. Also an occasional 'possum found himself in my cages. I think 'coon could be raised successfully there and, except for legal drawbacks, quite profitably too—I don't know how fine the game department might draw the technical end of it, but of late they seem more than willing to make trouble.

Last winter a friend of mine in Orlando got the notion he wanted to raise both 'coon and 'possum, so he applied for a permit to raise them. They didn't send a permit for a fur farm. It seems the State Game Department is afraid some one else will make a bit of money. The permit he got said he could keep so many 'coon and 'possum for "breeding purposes only". I forget some of the restrictions, but they were plenty. The permit must be renewed every year and the Department reserves the right to refuse the renewal. The farm must be open to inspection by the game officials at all times. The Department has the right to take any game you raise out and turn it loose and pay you what they choose. (This is not so apt to happen with fur as with other things). They also state the permit is for breeding purposes only and forbid the use of your game for taxidermy purposes. Maybe under that they could refuse your right to pelt your 'coon when you get 'em raised. I don't know that, but it seems possible.

I don't know how my friend came out; but when I left he had a healthy pair of young 'coon I helped him catch. Maybe some time later I'll find out how far the Department let him go before they closed him out.

One of our neighbors a couple of years ago thought he would get ahead by penning up what 'coon he caught in his corn. The game warden told him he had a legal right to "kill 'em and leave 'em lay", but because he put them in a cage he had to pay a

fine. They let him keep the animals but he didn't make any money.

I think the main drawback to raising fur in Florida is the game law. Some years ago I heard of a skunk farm in the Okechobee country that paid. In those days there were no laws about keeping any fur but otter and beaver. There would not have been any trouble if a few minor points were overlooked, anyway.

Times have changed. The free range is gone. Most of us didn't know what that meant to us till it was gone. There is little freedom left there. In most places one cannot legally carry a gun except during the hunting season. Camps are sometimes searched to see if anyone brought a firearm. Hapsburg Liebe gives a good hint in the same number (January 1st). If you carry a gun to shoot snakes with (and I think you should) don't do it openly and don't tell everybody. There is a lot of hardware in that State that only sharp eyes would locate. Nowadays if anyone sets a trap *in the open* he has to stake it to keep dogs and hogs out. I found one such set that caught a 'coon. Mostly they don't set 'em in the open any more. Some game wardens claim that even bait pens are included and must be staked.—HENRY L. ROGERS, Box 1782, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Kriegspiel

COMRADE SHERLOCK has spent much time with a game that sounds absorbing. I wonder if some of the gang at the Edward Hines Hospital would not like to tackle it? For an up-to-date comment, we asked Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson to answer Mr. Sherlock.

As I have been a reader of *Adventure* and a member of the Camp-Fire for a number of years, just thought I would drop you a line and see if you would help me out.

To begin with, I have always been a military enthusiast. Guess I have read all of Nason's and Wheeler-Nicholson's stories and they sure are A-1. You cannot beat their characters. Also like Surdez. However, about seven years ago I hit upon an idea for a war game. I have heard that Kaiser Bill used several thousand lead soldiers for his little war problems, also that the German Staff played *Kriegspiel* to keep themselves in trim for "der Tag". As I have a leaning towards the realistic, I started to make up a game that would be more realistic than K.B.'s. and more interesting. How well I have succeeded is yet to be seen, but a friend of mine, in Cleveland, who has worked out several little problems with me, says it cannot be beaten. (No, I am not patting myself on the back yet, either.)

I started rather modestly and had one scrap about four years ago. My friend took the part of Foch and I had to play Fritz. I lost, but the game worked out O.K. I kept on adding to both sides, so that in seven years from the beginning I have between one and two thousand figures, including infantry, cavalry, artillery large and small, machine-guns, trench-mortars, trucks, R. R. engines and flatcars, observation balloons, etc. I have made all of these with pen and ink, colored pencil, Bristol board and glue. It certainly takes a lot of one's spare time, but I guess it is not such a bad hobby. This whole force operates on a field about five feet wide by ten feet in length. This field is divided into five-eighth-inch squares, and on it are drawn the trenches, woods, towns, railroads, shellholes, barbed-wire, dugouts, tunnels, hills, rivers, bridges, and everything else known to a battlefield. The trenches occupy the center of the board with a No Man's Land between, the object being to drive the opponent off the field. The G.O.C. on each side has his small maps in proportion to the large field, to lay his plans by and dope out his artillery fire. He does not see the battlefield. All the reports are made by runner, telephone, motorcycle or car. As close as I can figure out, it works pretty much like the real thing. It is not a kid's game at all, but requires a little thinking and figuring to dope it all out. Of course, there are lots of things in the fighting in France, that cannot be put into this game, but the main issue, fighting, *is* there.

Now, this is my request. Being a dreamer, but having to work for a living, I started this game with all the intent of having the Big Push some day. Now, I do not have the space to put the field up, and do not have the time to work it out. It would take quite a bit of time to fight it to a finish. I have not enjoyed A-1 health the last few years, as I have to work inside at the commercial art game. I hope to get out some day, for the old saying reads "hope springs eternal within the human breast". Therefore, not having a chance to use the game and seeing none in the future, I thought someone in this universe might get a bit of enjoyment out of it, or use it for a training board. I thought you might pass the word along, or know someone who would appreciate it. I will gladly give it to anyone interested.

Best o' luck.

—H. A. SHERLOCK, 1023 Tusc St., W., Canton, Ohio.

Major Wheeler-Nicholson's comment:

The editor of *Adventure* has forwarded me your very interesting letter concerning the war game that you have evolved and perfected. Your account of it is exceedingly intriguing and makes me wish that I could find opportunity to see it.

You may not know it but the American Army played a lot of *Kriegspiel*, one of our favorite battlefields being the topographical maps of the Gettysburg campaign. Our method of playing this was to have the group of officers divide into two parties each one of which had on a table in a separate room a twelve-inch map of the battlefield. We used map measurers, scales, dividers and small celluloid

guides showing the rate of march of different units cavalry, infantry, artillery, etc. In spite of the technical sound of all this the game was exceedingly interesting, each side making its moves in accordance with the sparse information given the respective forces by the umpires who walked from room to room. By this method one could get a very graphic idea of the contact of cavalry patrols, of the approach and contact of formed bodies and of the bringing into play of main bodies and reserves. These games were of course based on the principles of open warfare, while your game has the added advantage of involving the lessons of trench warfare.

From your description I gather that your game would have a practical value and would suggest that you get in touch with some Regular Army officer in your vicinity, preferably the officer detailed to instruct the organized reserves in your district. By such means you might get suggestions and criticisms which would assist you in modifying your game and making it conform to the needs of the Army Tactical Schools and Staff College. Why don't you try this? Good luck to you and your experiment.

—WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Man-Eaters

CHARLES GILSON, whose tales of the Orient received a high ranking in our annual Readers' Vote, yarns a bit concerning some of his swimming experiences.

I WAS interested in William Ashley Anderson's "Dangerous Depths" because, for my sins, I know Aden. A friend of mine once re-addressed a letter, sent to a man who had died there of dysentery, by adding an H to the word and changing the last letter into an "s" . . . Aden certainly can qualify as an antechamber to the Hot Place!

I suppose there are more sharks at the mouth of the Red Sea than anywhere else in the world, and in the old days more than one diving boy was done in. But that sharks will come into quite shallow water when they are hungry I know for a fact, and my sailor colleagues on *Adventure* who know more about it than I do, will bear me out, no doubt.

I remember a terrible tragedy some years ago on Manly Beach, outside Sydney Harbor. When I bathed there, I preferred moderately deep water and to pay a small fee for the protection of a kind of stockade of strong stakes placed near enough together to keep out the sharks. On early closing days in Sydney the beach was always packed, and you would see hundreds of people bathing, but none of them out of his depth. There would be a long line of men playing about in about five feet of water, then the women who seldom went in more than waist deep, and finally the children many of whom were only paddling. Well, on this occasion a big blue shark came clean through the men and the women, seized a child by a leg in such shallow water that the whole of its stomach was visible when it turned over, and tried to make out to deep water again. A man seized one of the child's arms and held the shark in a sort of ghastly tug-of-war, until the beast was beaten off. But by then the child's leg had gone, and the poor little kid died shortly afterwards.

I HAVE never consciously run the risks that Mr. Anderson took, but I remember an experience I once had in Honolulu. I had only just arrived at Waikiki where I stayed several weeks, and, as everyone knows, the surf bathing there is the greatest fun in the world. I left a beach crowded with people, including many honeymoon couples from San Francisco, and must have swum more than half a mile out into the bay, when my attention was attracted by such a hullabaloo that I thought old Diamond Head had waked up and burst into eruption again. Looking back to the beach, I saw everyone waving towels and dancing about like maniacs. As I seemed to be the inoffensive cause of this commotion, I turned and swam ashore, where I found that everyone had gone home to lunch, with the exception of a doctor friend of mine who is now a well known specialist in electro-therapeutics in Mayfair.

"What was all that fuss about?" I asked, completely mystified.

"Well, we were a little concerned about you," he replied. "For three reasons: in the first place, you went clean through the reef, and as there are only about two openings a few feet wide, you were considerably lucky. The coral is sharp as a razor, and if you had cut yourself, you might have got gangrene and I would have had to amputate your leg. Secondly, the reef is full of octopi, and big ones, too. If two or three of them had got hold of you, you would have known all about it. And lastly, you've evidently never seen a white shark."

The incident was very forcibly impressed upon me a few days afterwards when I actually did see a white shark.[1] He was a colossal beast that must have been nearly thirty feet long. Some Japanese fishermen had caught him in that very bay; and the aquarium authorities, wanting to keep him alive, had a special cement tank made for him in which he was curled up like a whiting. He was quite unhurt, as he had been hauled high and dry in a net, but when I saw him he was rapidly giving up the ghost from sheer funk. He only lived about twenty-four hours. Indeed he died of a complaint that a medical officer of mine during the War always described on official sick reports as "*pedes frigidi*"—in other words, "cold feet".—CHARLES GILSON.

His Hat In The Ring

SOMEWHERE it has been written that it takes ten centuries to transform a forest into a peat bog, and then ten centuries more to make good bituminous

coal of the peat. I don't vouch for that; but having seen old New England houses in which hand-hewn rafters of oak were solid and apparently unharmed after more than one hundred years of service, I am prepared to believe in the existence of the planks described by Mr. Willey.

Comrade Blair is inclined to doubt. But he offers a broad defi to anyone really interested in getting that Norse treasure.

The article in the last issue of *Adventure* by Mr. Willey, regarding the very famous treasure on Oak Island, was very interesting; but I wonder if those oak planks could have lasted all the centuries that they say they did? However, if you know anybody that wants that treasure gotten up absolutely, without any chance whatever of failure, *without* spending any fortune, I just hope you sic him on me.

—FRANK P. BLAIR, Blair & Marin, Marine Salvage, 19 East Congress St., Chicago, Ill.

The Straightforward Style

THE MATTER of punctuation in stories now and then starts a mild dispute between authors (or readers) and the editors of *Adventure*. It is true that we eliminate all hyphens, colons, dashes and the like we believe unnecessary to good sense. Our rule is simply this:

Make every sentence, every paragraph, every story as clear and understandable as it can be made. Use every help toward this end, but retain nothing unnecessary or confusing.

Take the hyphen, for instance. Many scripts, otherwise letter perfect, are hyphenated throughout until the sentences fairly resemble tapeworms. Usually a full half of the hyphens can be eliminated with profit—though most dictionaries still hold fast to the Victorian English custom of hyphenating almost any two words not separated one from another by a period . . .

The writer of the following courteous letter takes a stand diametrically opposed to our present policy. I respect his views and therefore present them in full—*unedited*. However, if this were not an excellent letter and a good point on which I'd like to hear other comrades express themselves, I'd plug in the hyphen eradicator . . .

Because I have read the *Adventure* for fifteen years, I have come to look upon it as an old friend, one who comes regularly to visit me, bringing interesting-stories of places, people and things of which I know little.

A friend who came decked out each time in a different costume, but which, within, always carried the same-type of easy-to-understand stories.

But last year, some-one in your office changed this old friend's style of story-telling, making it easier and yet harder to understand the stories: Forced me to read them twice.

Easier because of the larger type used, and harder because most of the describing and naming words have lost their hyphens. Lost the hyphens because there was no space between the close-jammed words, or because the space left was too wide for this little sense-linking mark.

As you know, when one is speaking to convince the hearer, he must enunciate each word clearly and make only the smallest of pauses between the words; must accent certain key-words by the rise or fall of the voice so that they will be firmly impressed in one's hearer's mind.

And in writing, where the author loses this face-to-face contact with his audience, he must make use of all the punctuation points which have the power to point out or off, the important words in the sentence. The value of the sentence is lost if his audience does not get the exact meaning which he has in mind when he is writing the sentence.

The reader's eyes have been trained to race along the word-filled line, with just the tiniest of pauses at each word, at which time the fast-working mind receives from the eyes the sight-picture of this word. It seeks for and finds the exact shade of the definition, from all the other definitions of the word, because it has accumulated the definitions of all the words used prior in the sentence, and only one definition can key-in to these other ones.

And now, should the word-identifying eyes come upon a strange-lettered word or one with no connecting link, the startled eyes stare at it in bewilderment, sending to the brain a jumbled picture. The brain whirrs wildly seeking to find a definition that will conform with and strengthen those prior-collected definitions. Right there, the thread of the story parts. It is impossible to tie up by continuing the reading, for the knot obscures the meaning of this sentence. No! To get back into the thralldom of the story, one must start back at some earlier sentence and re-read that part over again.

Again, descriptive words gain in word-sense and sentence-strength when they are closely linked with other naming words. They form a word-picture which often stirs the reader's mind into producing a memory-picture from some incident in his own life. When this happens, they form the key-words of the sentence, hypnotizing him, making him certain that this story really happened—is happening as he reads.

Or, in the case of some written and printed stories, the words follow along in orderly array, with

very few punctuation breaks and no pointed-off words. This induces a condition not unlike day-dreaming. His eyes hardly see the printed words, his brain sluggishly supplies a definition—the easiest one it can reach out and grasp. Later, if asked what was said, what happened during this part of the story, the reader has only a very hazy remembrance.

But suppose now, the author had blocked off the most important sense-meaning words thruout these sentences. Made use of hyphens, blocked off certain parts of the sentence with dashes? The reader would have a clean-cut remembrance of what happened and what striking things were said, because in his memory-album would be pictures formed by the descriptive words.

In closing, I wish to register approval for the new way you are printing the synopsis at the start of the continued stories. That old form with line after line of fine-printed words was space-wasting and not overly necessary. If the magazine came but once a month there would be a chance for a reader forgetting, but there is very little when the period is only fifteen days.

So, hoping that you will understand that this letter is written only because I am answering your request in the Dec. 1st and 15th issues, and because I want my *Adventure* to continue to be the best magazine published, I am signing off.

—S. W. HENDERSON, Berkeley, Cal.

OF COURSE this may seem to take a slightly unfair advantage of Comrade Henderson; but I wish to assure him that anything more he and other sympathizers with his cause wish to say, will be welcomed in these pages.

It may be of slight interest to most people—because after all *Adventure* is planned first, last and always to entertain—but lately the Boards of Education of three States have recommended it upon their lists of approved reading.

But on the other hand—the circumstance brought to our attention by a U. S. Naval officer stationed in the Islands—the National Federation of Women's Clubs of the Philippines has passed and published a resolution condemning *Adventure* as subversive of the morals of youth!

Well, I scarcely know what to say, though I'd like to debate that particular point with the ghost of Cotton Mather—or with any modern critic. Possibly some Comrades may feel an urge to write the good ladies in convention assembled. If I had such a thing to spare, I'd donate a complete bound file of *Adventure* to that organization—and request the case of one single young Filipino who has been harmed in any way!

Between the extremes of being snubbed in one place and recommended highly in another, must lie some mean of common sense. Possibly it is suggested by the following letter—which also is presented without office editing.

DEAR EDITOR:

I'm no American, nor Englishman; I'm Brazilian.

Four months ago, I didn't know any word of your language. Oh, yes— I knew what you mean, saying "Good morning"—"Good evening," and a few obscene expressions. You know that's the first thing a fellow learns of every tongue.

Well, just four months ago then, I began learning English.

Without two-legged teacher!

A friend of mine presented me with a couple of *Adventures*. I was very interested in the novelettes. The headings, and especially the cover designs (particularly Hubert Roger's) attracted my attention. I envied every one who read the storys—until at last I bought a dictionary and began study.

First of all I read a short story (don't remember which). Each word whose sense I couldn't imagine, I wrote on a piece of paper, then used my dictionary—thus I learned.

Be sure, I had to be very, very pacient and . . *Adventure's* made a record: it's highly interesting material helped me to continue stubbornly my work.

I congratulate myself.

Sure enough, where ever I go, *Adventure* goes with me. It's not only my teacher—but my very, very precious friend.

—LUIZ FIRITRINORYES, Compañia Nacioñal de Electricidad, San José, Costa Rica.

THE RESOLUTION of condemnation to which I referred above, was passed and printed in the *Manila Times*—with no chance given *Adventure* to answer charges or offer a defense. Why are censors invariably all-wise and self-sufficient?

—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Angling

IMPORTANT points on dry fly fishing for brook trout.

Request:—"Will you please answer the following questions in regards dry fly fishing for brook trout?

1. Is it possible to fish trout with dry flies without spending a small fortune for equipment such as tapered line, expensive leaders, flies, etc.?

2. How many flies should be used on a leader at one time?

3. Are dry flies with gut attached to hook as good as those without?

4. How are flies dried after being cast a few times?

5. Name some of the best dry flies and some of the best wet flies.

6. Are all flies made by the different companies made the same? Which style is best?

7. Is it best to fish upstream or downstream?

8. Are the flies reeled right up to the rod before being lifted from the water?

9. How far should one be able to cast?

10. How far backward and forward should the rod swing when getting the line out before the actual cast is made?

11. Are the flies tossed on the water above where the fisherman believes a fish is and allowed to float down over the fish, or is the fly put on the water right over the fish and immediately lifted?

12. Do you favor looped leaders or those without loops?

13. Can you show me a good way of tying flies to gut leaders?"—EUGENE ZIEGLER, Duluth, Minn.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—1. You can get a dry fly outfit for a very reasonable sum, but it is advisable to have a good tapered line and fine leaders because they will last a long time and help your sport.

2. Only one fly should be used at a time.

3. I prefer dry flies without snells, and tie them direct to leader.

4. Make a few casts in the air without letting fly touch the water.

5. Wet flies: Coachman, Silver Doctor, Professor, Royal Coachman, Queen of Waters, Rubewood, Seth Green, Grizzly King, Brown Hackle, Gray Hackle, Black Gnat, Parmachene Belle. Dry flies: Ginger Quill, March Brown, Cow Dung, Cahill, Dark Coachman, Silver Sedge, Beaverkill, Coachman, Hare's Ear, Montreal, White Miller, Golden Monkey. But you will get good results from many others.

6. At the same price most companies make the same grade of fly.

7. Fish upstream, particularly on slow streams.

8. No, the flies are not reeled up to the rod but picked off the water with a quick lift with the rod.

9. For dry fly fishing no need to cast over forty feet.

10. A good idea is not to let rod tip go back of the ear.

11. Dry fly fishermen are supposed to fish to the rise of a fish, but in this country they seldom do. They fish where the fish ought to be, allowing flies to float down over the likely place.

12. I favor a leader with one loop to attach to line—only one loop.

13. Tie direct to leader with the jam or turtle knot you learned as a boy.

Leather

ON PRESERVING and polishing equipment.

Request:—"Request information regarding care of boots, belts, etc; in fact, all parts of horse and personal leather equipment.

What cleaning and polishing agents do you recommend?

How would you go about developing a high polish on boots, belts and visor?

How is a bone ('deer-shank') used? Just what can it be expected to accomplish?

Can you recommend any test that covers the above?"—L. L. M., Boston, Mass.

Reply, by Captain R. Townsend:—There are many methods of preserving and polishing leather equipment; each method with its own advocates. There is no one "official" method used throughout the Army. While the method should be basically sound, the results secured by any good method will depend largely upon the care with which it is applied. Here is a method of caring for leather equipment, which is much used in the Army and which I have personally used and found satisfactory:

First, clean the leather thoroughly with a good quality of castile soap and warm water, using just enough water to work up a good lather. Wipe the surface of the leather dry with a clean soft cloth and, using a sponge, apply a good lather of saddle soap. Be sure to work the soap up into a good stiff lather before applying. Cover the surface of the leather with this lather and set the article aside to dry. Do not place in the sun or near a stove or radiator but in a dry cool place with free circulation of air. In 20 minutes to half an hour remove the dried lather with a clean cloth and then polish by rubbing the surface of the leather briskly with a good quality polishing brush. This will give a nice lustre to the leather and, if done frequently—at least once a week or oftener, depending upon use—will be all the care that is necessary to keep any leather equipment in good shape.

Where an especially high polish is desired for boots, belts, etc., follow the above procedure exactly, but after obtaining as good a polish as can be obtained with the saddle soap, apply a small quantity of some good polish (Royal Lutetian Cream, for example), spreading it evenly upon the leather and polishing with a soft cloth or brush.

Saddle equipment, such as the stirrup straps, bridle reins, saddle skirts, etc., may need occasional applications of Neet's foot oil to the under or raw side of the leather. Apply the oil sparingly with a soft cloth after washing the leather with castile soap. Allow it to dry in for a few hours and then remove all excess oil by going over the surface with a cloth dampened in clean soapy water. Dry with clean soft cloth. Use the oil sparingly and only when necessary to keep the leather from becoming hard and brittle—from three or four times a year to once a month, depending upon use, climate, etc.

The foregoing instructions if carefully followed out will enable you to keep any leather in good condition. Use only pure castile soap, the best grade of polishes and pure Neet's-foot oil. Be sure that your leather is perfectly clean before applying any polish and use only sufficient polish to secure even distribution over the entire surface, putting it on with a soft cloth, dauber, or by hand. Use plenty of "elbow-grease" and remember that constant care is necessary. No amount of care will ever bring leather which has been neglected, back to its original condition.

Calibers

AN EXPOSITION of the somewhat confusing designation of bore diameter and grain load.

Request:—"What is the difference between a .30 caliber rifle and a .30-30? Likewise a .45 and a .45-70?

I have heard the Army Springfield referred to as a .30-30 which I think is incorrect.

In a newspaper article this week I read of a revolver of .52 caliber. Is there such an animal? Sounds like a young cannon to me."—ELDON B. GREENLAND, Aberdeen, Md.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins: 1. The .30 denotes a bullet and bore diameter of thirty one-hundredths of an inch, and further nomenclature merely serves to identify the cartridge and gun further; thus we have the .30-30, which originally seems to have been loaded with about thirty grains of some special black powder experimentally, as I can't find any record of thirty grains of smokeless in any loading other than the .30 Model 1906 Service, the old .30 Army, the .30 Newton, and the .30 Magnum. All thirty caliber and all with different ballistics. The .45 is generally taken to refer to the revolver; the .45-70 always a rifle.

2. The Service cartridge, the .30 Model of 1906, commonly called "30'06" by riflemen, is more powerful, accurate and of better range than any .30-30. Many people ignorantly refer to it as a .30-30, however, and I've even heard Army officers so speak of the rifle and cartridge; it actually carries about forty-seven grains of powder as the service load, with the 150 grain bullet, or possibly more or less as the particular lot of powder demands to give the required velocity.

As to the .52 caliber revolver, I know of none such, but do know that a .59 caliber was once used by the French Army, and believe that cap-and-ball revolvers were made up to considerable size in bore here in the United States. The largest made today here is the .45, in Colt and Smith & Wesson makes.

South America

ON PANNING gold along tropical beaches.

Request:—"I remember reading a South American article of yours in which you tell of natives washing out modest sums of gold from tropical beaches, and I'd like to get some further information on the subject. I am thinking of places one could reach in a small combination sail and power boat drawing not over one foot of water.

But if you know a place with chances as good for metal and perhaps stones nearer salt water and where tropical fruits abound and the natives friendly and honest, I should be glad to hear of that."—X Y Z, New Brunswick, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—You ask me about a tropical place on a beach where gold can be panned. Time was I could have rattled off an answer—San Juan River of Colombia. I think I was the second white man who knew about gold on that river. The first one found it in 1883 and he and I were going back about 1907, but he died and some of my bunch got in trouble and I had to go to the east coast. Now there is half a million a month coming out of the San Juan and all or most of the world's platinum besides. The big companies have it tied up with concessions so a lone prospector has no chance in there now.

It is the same with all the main gold bearing streams of Colombia. There might be a chance for a man now in the section near the Ecuadorian frontier. There are some streams flowing into the Pacific from south of Buenaventura where the Indians used to do some panning. There was one trading post catering to them for their dust. This was on the mule trail from Quito (ends at Bogota) near the Ecuadorian line. Over across in Ecuador there is the Zaruma mine which has produced many millions in gold but there doesn't seem to be a thing other than the ledges they are working. They pack it out on mules.

In Colombia there are scores of placer and dredging propositions scattered all over the country. I have heard there is gold in the very northern peninsula that has not been grabbed yet but this is mere rumor. In Peru the Indians do a lot of panning in the unexplored country east of the Andes. There must have been diggings somewhere for the Incas to have got so much gold, but up to the present it has never been found in the ground except in graves and under churches.

THE Pacific side of Ecuador is mainly delta country and is too much covered with jungle for a man to prospect. No gold has shown up in Chile except down in the islands south of the Straits of Magellan and on the north side above Virgin Point. They had a gold rush there in 1893 but it petered out. I have seen men making a living panning sands near the Straits, but the climate down there is anything but tropical. It's not as cold as New Brunswick, but it does get down to about 20 above in the dead of winter (August).

On the eastern side of Bolivia there is plenty of gold along the streams flowing both toward the Amazon and toward the Paraguay. But it's a pretty wild country over there yet. A man can make friends with the Indians, but they have been on a rampage for the last few years and have tried to start a government of their own and they are a bit picky about whom they let enter. The Indians of Peru on the eastern side are friendly, with the exception of two tribes, and these rarely molest a white man. These are the Jiveros and the Cashibos. The Indians of eastern Ecuador are friendly. There is considerable placer gold on the bars of the Napo and Cururay and there might be smaller streams with good ledges. One hears of them from Indians, but when it comes time to find them they refuse to disclose the place. It can be reached from the Atlantic side by going direct from New York to Iquitos by steamer, taking the launch up as far as it goes up the Napo and canoeing the rest of the way. It can also be reached as I reached it *via* Shank's Mare from Quito. This means a trip to Guayaquil and R. R. to Quito, mule to Archidoma, and hike the rest.

VENEZUELA also has placer country and both Dutch and British Guiana have gold. There are some diamonds in the latter country also, small but fine colors. The laws on prospecting are a bit strict. Central America also has placer gold. There is an American company now operating two mines on the Prinzapolka River in Nicaragua.

The San Juancito gold mine is still running in Honduras; there are two or three in both Salvador and Guatemala, and many in Mexico. At present the latter country does not encourage foreigners, and wants Mexico for Mexicans. About the only place a man could get his foot in would be somewhere on the coast of lower California, but it's a very bleak place along that coast.

The very best places for fishing, living a tropical life without worry on the beach, climate, etc., don't seem to have gold bearing streams. I don't know just what the coast of Panama would show below the Zone. There is a producing mine at Cana up the Chuquinaqui River near the Colombian border. The country between there and the Canal Zone (200 miles) is unexplored and might have anything. The Indians on the Pacific side are more friendly than the San Blas on the eastern side, although the latter are much more friendly than they used to be. By getting up the slopes a couple of thousand feet a man can find perpetual spring right in the republic of Panama. Also there are quite a few pearls found along this side of Panama in addition to the rather well organized pearl fishing industry on the Pearl Islands some distance out.

To sum up:

1. I know of no place near a beach where there are gold bearing streams unless it would be Panama

or Colombia, or possibly Central America, but most stuff there is low grade.

2. You can reach eastern Ecuador *via* the Amazon, also on foot from Quito. These are the tame Indians who like white folks.

3. There is gold on the beaches south of Straits of Magellan, but it is very bleak and lonesome and the Indians down there are not the best neighbors a man could wish.

Boxing Versus Fencing

SOME points of similarity, and some of difference, in these two favorite sports. The "shock punch" and the "heavy hand."

Request:—"How do boxing and fencing compare, in the last analysis, as sports. Is fencing good training for a boxer or boxing good for fencing?"

—WINIFRED H. WEBER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Captain John V. Grombach:—Fencing and boxing are very similar in technique yet are very different. This paradox is true because of the forthcoming fact:

Both fencing and boxing depend upon speed of foot, coordination and judgment of distance. Further than that, "change of pace" can be effectively used in both. And still another point of similarity is in the fact that both depend on a position of "on guard" which might be described as on one diagonal. According to theory, a boxer stands as little broadside to an opponent as possible. In fencing the same is true, though the so called diagonals are different. A normal right handed man has his right shoulder and right arm grasping his sword forward in fencing, but his left shoulder and arm advanced in boxing.

Though fencing is very good training for the boxer the reverse does not operate in the same manner. This is due to the fact with all the similarities mentioned the sports are very unlike with especial regard to the muscles employed and the conditions of the muscles when used. The boxer in delivering a blow uses his shoulder and back muscles followed by the whole weight of his body. The fencer on the other hand, employs a supple wrist and forearm muscle and seldom anything else.

The boxer, though generally relaxed, tightens and tautens his muscles at the instant of delivery of a punch. It is this sudden spring action from relaxation to rigidity that creates the so called "shock punch" which drops the opponent face down in the ring. In fencing when an opening occurs, instead of setting the muscle sinews, a lunge is made into perfect ease and suppleness. A person who can not relax, especially the arm and shoulder muscles, can never become an adept fencer and is known as possessing a "heavy hand".

So that the practise in speed, coordination, and judgment distance that a boxer gets in fencing is beneficial. However, the practise of tightening the shoulder muscles and following through with the weight of the body that a fencer would get in boxing would be detrimental to correct fencing form.

Great Lakes

MR. H. C. GARDNER writes a brief article on obtaining employment on the Lake steamers.

THE SHIPS of the Great Lakes are incorporated, so far as employment goes, in one great association called "The Lake Carriers." This association has, at all principal ports on the lakes, employment and assembly rooms for the sailors or would-be sailors. The would-be sailor's first duty is to hunt up one of these assembly rooms or halls and register; the fee is one dollar per year. For this dollar the sailor receives a discharge book giving his rating, age and general identification. For the same dollar he also receives an accident insurance policy for the sum of $75.00. And the would-be sailor must bear in mind he *can not* "ship out" without first registering.

The next question invariably asked is: What positions are open to one who has never sailed before? Briefly, there are but three, namely, deckhand, porter or coal passer. All named come under the head of ordinary seamen.

The next question is: What are the duties of each?

Of the three, the deckhand's is probably the hardest, but is preferable in that it is more healthful. His duties include the handling of the ship's lines while in port, the removal and battening of cargo hatches, taking aboard the cook's supplies, and keeping the ship's paint work in trim.

The porter's duties are washing dishes, waiting table, peeling "spuds" and making beds.

The coal passers pass coal, "shoot ashes" and keep the firehold clean.

Deckhands work nine hours a day, Sundays and holidays off. Overtime is paid for at the regular rate or time off is taken.

Porters work about eight hours a day seven days per week.

Coal passers work in watches of three hours on duty and six off.

The wages are: deckhand, $77.00 per month; porter, $75.00 per month; coal passer, $72.00 per month. Neat quarters, good food and beds furnished.

This is about all I can think of that would be of interest to the man trying for the first time to secure employment on the Great Lakes.

For those who have sailed the salt water, the same applies, with the exception of ratings above ordinary seamen.

Able seamen including wheelman, watchman, fireman, oilers, etc., receive $105.00 per month; boatswain, $120.00; second cooks, $90.00 per month and up.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organisations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville. Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and Traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

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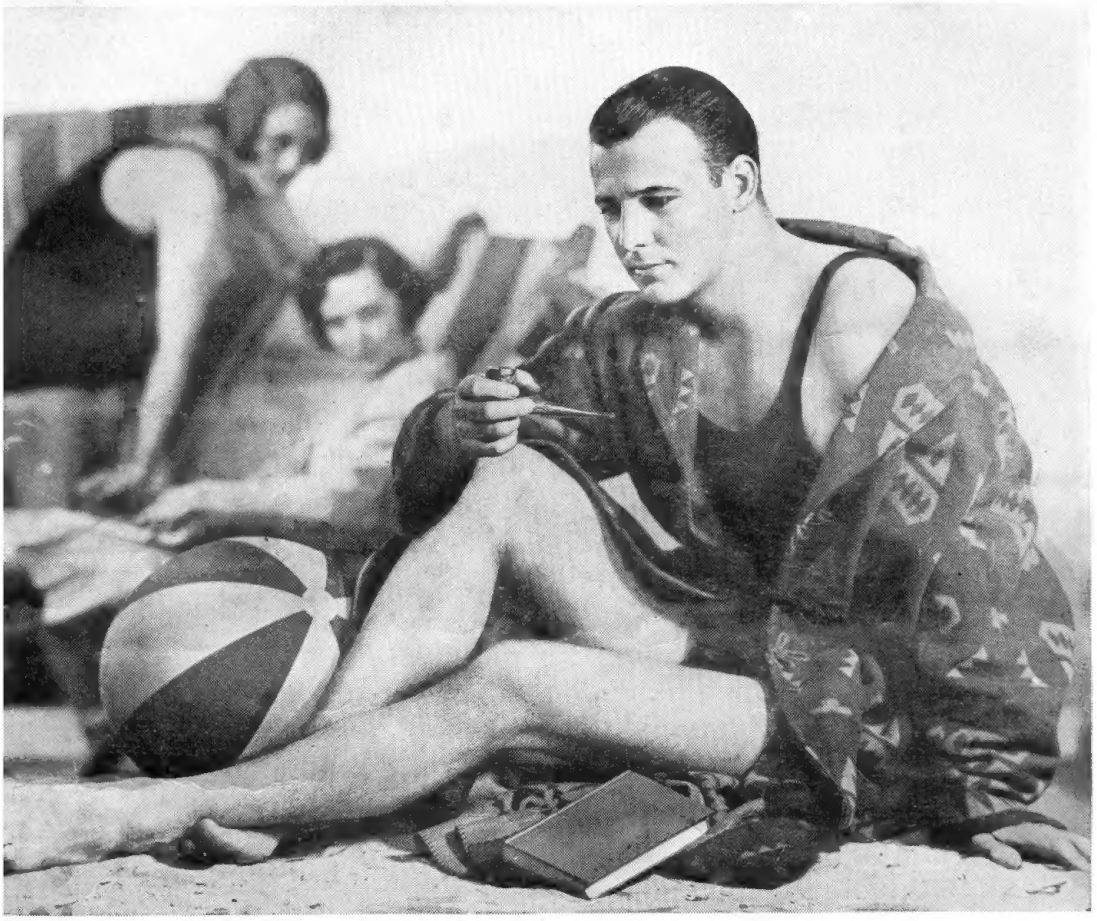

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